



Mar 11, 2015 00:00 GMT

Fellowship honour for leading psychologist

A psychologist who demonstrated that breakfast clubs improve children's performance in school has been awarded a Fellowship by the British Psychological Society.

Professor Greta Defeyter, the Director of Northumbria University's Healthy Living research unit, is a leading expert on breakfast clubs and a member of several advisory panels, including the All Party Parliamentary Group on School Food. She advises government, industry and academia of the importance of breakfast clubs and the consumption of breakfast on

educational performance, nutrition, social behaviours and community cohesion.

The British Psychological Society has awarded a Fellowship to Professor Defeyter based on the impact of her research programme around school breakfast clubs and school-based physical activity interventions as well as her commitment to furthering the impact and reach of psychology in 'real life'.

A Fellowship is awarded recognition of an individual's significant contribution to the advancement or communication of psychological knowledge or practice, either by research, teaching, publications or public service. It is one of the highest honours that the Society can bestow and demonstrates a significant contribution to and understanding of the discipline.

Professor Defeyter's research investigated the effects of attending breakfast clubs and consuming breakfast on children's behaviour, considering their cognitive performance and social friendships. Working in partnership with Kellogg's, she showed that children who attended school breakfast clubs integrated better into their school community and had more positive attitudes towards their peers and teachers than other children.

Teachers who established breakfast clubs as a result of Professor Defeyter's research have reported gains in attendance, punctuality, motivation and quality of life for many of the children involved. As a direct result, Blackpool Council decided to invest £1.3 million to fund universal free breakfast club provision for all primary school children in 2013/14.

Speaking about her award, Professor Defeyter said: "This is an incredibly prestigious title which is awarded through a peer reviewed process. There are only a few Fellows of the British Psychological Society in the North East of England and I'm thrilled to have been bestowed with this honour; especially as my research is making a real difference to children, families and communities."

Professor George Marston, Pro Vice-Chancellor for Research and Innovation at Northumbria University, added: "This is a thoroughly deserved award for Greta. She a leading expert in her field, and this award is a real recognition of the proven benefit her research has brought to society."

Professor Defeyter's findings have been translated into the UK's first online teaching programme for teachers, governors, NHS Public Health Advisors and parent volunteers, resulting in the development of more than 200 breakfast clubs across the UK.

The findings were also recognised in the latest Research Excellence Framework exercise, which assesses the quality of research in UK universities. Almost three quarters of Northumbria's research in the field of Psychology, which includes

Professor Defeyter's research into breakfast clubs, was judged to have outstanding reach and significance for its impact on society. Professor Defeyter is currently working with the Newcastle United Foundation to evaluate the effectiveness of its Match Fit programme which combines fitness, football and nutrition to increase health awareness and physical activity in children aged 7-11.

She is also working with a number of organisations investigating the effect of children living in households experiencing food poverty and holiday hunger on health, social behaviours and educational attainment.

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