

Centre for Discovery of Brain Sciences – University of Edinburgh

This was our third visit to the Spires-Jones Lab at the Centre for Discovery of Brain Sciences at the University of Edinburgh. Neuroscientist, Professor Tara Spires-Jones is the Director of the Centre and President of the British Neuroscience Association. Tara is also an Alzheimer Scotland Ambassador. At the core of our campaigning work in Active Voice is research. We remain engaged with emerging research developments and this relationship with the University and the Lab Manager Jane Tulloch ensures that we are abreast of developments in research.



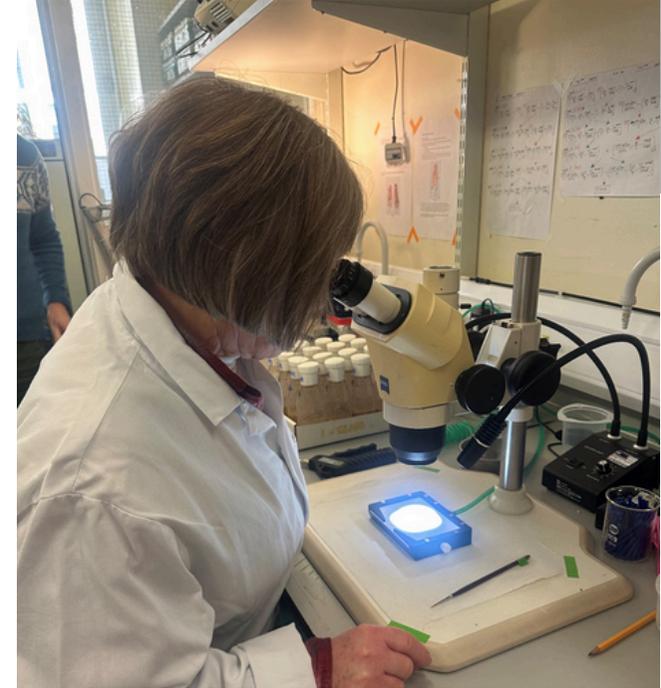
Research brings hope, and this opportunity brings insight to our members on the work that is going on in the field of research in Scotland. We always look the part and are kitted out in our white coats before the tour of the Science building over three floors which includes the 'Spires-Jones' and 'Durrant' labs. We learned how researchers are exploring why synapses are damaged in Alzheimer's disease and whether boosting the resilience of synapses can protect the brain – Wow!

Professors, Postdocs and PhD students shared the complexities of their work including studying living human brain tissue sharing the process they follow when they get the call for a donation from the local hospital where a partnership has been built with the University, for example people who have a brain tumour and are having successful operations to remove the tumour agree to donate their brain tissue from a section of their brain .



The use of fruit fly models is always a favourite for all attendees, the enthusiasm that is given by the Postdocs and students in this lab is infectious and makes you want to be part of it - thank you for Dr James Catterson for his time. After the tour we are treated to cake! Always another highlight of our day, this year coconut sponge and flapjacks.

Professor Tara Spires-Jones facilitated a discussion introducing Active Voice members Joanna, Elaine, Margaret and Rynagh to the staff team and students. This is always an interesting feature of the visit, and the students and Lab Team introduce themselves and share a bit about their hopes and aspirations on the work they do and how meeting SDWG and NDCAN members fuels their passion in the work they do. Students also link with Alzheimer Scotland through volunteering and fundraising opportunities.



This was NDCAN Member Joanna's first visit to the Centre, and she shares her experience and take-home messages:

"I've heard much about previous visits to the Spires-Jones and Durrant labs, so was delighted finally to be able to visit myself. The visit totally lived up to expectations. It was an afternoon of hope and inspiration – and awe and admiration at the skill and dedication of all the researchers in their commitment to find treatments and a cure for dementia. They come from all over the world and it was especially good to see how many of them were women, expertly led by Tara and Claire!

"We were given lab coats to wear for the lab tour and that brought back memories of my mum, who is my inspiration for campaigning about dementia. Mum was a pharmacist who wore a lab coat at work and those lab coats are one of my childhood memories! She would have been fascinated to see the research into a disease which affected her and it reminded me again of the importance of research.

"The lab tour was fascinating and the researchers were so enthusiastic in talking about their research and explaining it in language we could understand. It was interesting to hear how tiny slices of live brain tissue removed during brain surgery were being used; this was tissue which would otherwise be discarded. We also heard about the donated tissue from the brain tissue bank and were able to look at the samples which were so tiny but so valuable. It was also good to hear about the retrieval process and see how much care and respect is taken of these precious and generous donations. We also got to look at fruit flies down a microscope – and it was amazing to realise there was so much could be learned from the brains of such tiny creatures.

"We ended the afternoon meeting the team over tea and cake, sharing our stories, hearing from the researchers and talking about why dementia research is so important. They gave us such a warm welcome and it felt like a true partnership. All in all a wonderful afternoon and I left feeling positive about the future and grateful for the opportunity to visit the lab."

Active Voice Development Officer Mhairi McDonald also on her first visit to the Centre gives her impressions and experience:

"our visit to the the Spire-Jones and Durrant labs at Edinburgh University made for an inspiring experience. The researchers and students alike had a powerful enthusiasm for their work and displayed such commitment to dementia research. We were lucky enough to have the opportunity to tour the labs where we got to learn about the specialised work and machinery that goes into the progress of finding effective treatments, and hopefully a cure for Alzheimer's disease.

After a tour of the lab, we sat with Professor Tara Spire-Jones and students where SDWG and NDCAN members spoke from the side of lived experience. It was apparent that there is real belief at the Centre for Discovery Brain Sciences in the importance for researchers to work collaboratively with people of lived experience. I found it very touching to see the students listen so intently to the personal experiences that SDWG and NDCAN members shared. It really seemed they were equally as inspired from the visit as were."

