Welcome to DCAL’s eNewsletter

And the winner is...? DCAL scoops major award

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From the Director’s Chair

It has been another jam-packed six months of activity within DCAL.

In November we celebrated - in some style—DCAL’s 10th Birthday. The anniversary provided us with an opportunity to look back at our research and see what we have achieved: ground-breaking research publications, the development of language and cognitive assessments for deaf children and adults, a monthly national NHS clinic for deaf adults with memory problems, BSL SignBank, and an array of award-winning public engagement and widening participation activities.

However, the celebrations were not just about looking back but were also an opportunity to look forward to the future with new research and teaching programmes, maintaining our commitment to building capacity in the field and to the continuing collaboration of deaf and hearing researchers and teachers.

In January, one of DCAL’s Deputy Director’s, Prof. Gary Morgan, was awarded a grant by the influential Leverhulme Trust, to lead an International Network of researchers in the examination of trans-national perspectives on sign language.

In February, DCAL received an award for the most significant research contribution to Deaf studies at the Royal Association for Deaf People’s 175th Birthday Honours Awards Ceremony.

In March, I met with the new Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness, Jim Fitzpatrick MP, to discuss DCAL’s research and the work programme of the Group over the next twelve months.

In April, Dr Velia Cardin and I visited Russia where we are collaborating on a research project with colleagues at Moscow State Linguistics University. And in May, DCAL and UCL co-hosted an excellent free deaf awareness event entitled ‘Am I being rude?’.

Going forward there are a number of exciting events on the horizon, including a Neural Plasticity Workshop, which Dr Cardin and I are leading on, the launches of DCAL’s Assessment Portal and SignBank App and the hosting of our third summer school for deaf students – all of which are detailed in this newsletter.

Finally, this will be my last message from the ‘Director’s Chair’, as I plan to step down from this role. It has been an honour and a privilege to work with such a talented group of individuals here at the Centre and within University College London. I will not be disappearing from the department just yet, as I have a new grant from the British Academy to study cognitive benefits of language learning – more details about this later in the newsletter.

However, I would like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank UCL, the Economic and Social Research Council, my fellow DCAL Directors, and all the staff and students that have played a part in the Centre’s extraordinary success.

Bencie

Prof Bencie Woll, Director
DCAL academic secures prestigious grant award

Deputy Director of the Deafness, Cognition and Language Research Centre, Professor Gary Morgan, has been awarded a significant grant to lead an International Network of researchers in the examination of trans-national perspectives on sign language.

Gary Morgan, who is a Professor of Psychology at City University, has been one of the DCAL directors for over a decade. He recently secured the prestigious research grant from the Leverhulme Trust, one of the largest all-subject providers of research funding in the UK, to explore how hearing people learn British Sign Language (BSL) as a foreign language.

The research project, led by Prof. Morgan, will be an international collaboration with academics based in London, Hamburg, Lund, Amsterdam and Barcelona and has two principal aims: to bring together a specific group of researchers to help shape a future research programme; and to develop new methods and research paradigms to investigate this topic further.

In 2013, Prof. Morgan led a symposium on sign language learning at the European Second Language Acquisition Conference (EUROSLA). This was the first time the conference had included sign language learning by hearing adults. Prof. Morgan therefore believes that there is a pressing need for sign language investigators to interact more with spoken language second language researchers and he hopes the Network will increase the synergy across research fields and bring ‘great theoretical and practical value’.

Commenting on the grant award, Prof. Morgan said:

“I’m extremely pleased that the International Network that I will be leading has secured this very significant grant award from the Leverhulme Trust. I believe the topic area and the potential project outcomes will be of great interest, not just to teachers and learners of BSL, but also to mainstream second language researchers because it will further advance the understanding of how people learn a second language.

BSL is the first language of Deaf people in the UK but there has been an enormous increase in the numbers of hearing people learning BSL in recent years. In 2009 there were an estimated 190,000 hearing adults who had learned at least basic level BSL and they did so for a number of different reasons – as a second language, for a hobby, or for personal and professional reasons. However we know almost nothing about how hearing adults learn to sign and whether it differs from learning a spoken second language.

Research on sign language learning can impact greatly on current models and theories of how people learn a second language. As BSL is not based on sounds, it is difficult to see how learners’ first language might influence their understanding of signs. For example what does a foreign accent look like in a sign language or how does learners’ use of gestures influence their learning of BSL?

Therefore the aim of this International Network is to begin to fill the current research gap and in doing so, bring theoretical and practical value across the range of relevant research fields.”

For more information on DCAL research follow us on twitter @DCAL_UCL or visit the media section of our website.
Major launches coming soon!

The DCAL team have two very exciting launches coming up in the next few weeks.

The first is the launch of the DCAL Assessment Portal, which will take place on 8th June. The Portal is a website created to provide practitioners (for example teachers, clinical and educational psychologists and speech and language therapists) and researchers with access to a number of the clinical and research assessments developed by DCAL over the past 10 years. The assessments can be used by approved professionals and academic researchers to examine speechreading, sign language, and cognition skills in both deaf children and adults. The Portal includes tests of child and adult speechreading, assessments of sign language vocabulary and grammar, and the only language and cognitive assessments in the world designed for deaf people with acquired neurological impairments such as stroke or dementia.

The DCAL Assessment Portal will have significant impact on the lives of deaf people if it is used by both specialist professionals and others who have a role in providing services for deaf children and adults. By giving professionals access to the assessment tools, NHS and educational services will be more effectively and efficiently targeted at individuals. The Portal is also available to researchers who want to include language assessments as part of their research.

The second launch will be of the BSL SignBank App.

BSL SignBank is an on-line video dictionary with video clips of several thousand signs including regional variants (BSLSignBank.ucl.ac.uk). The new SignBank App develops this facility further with two main functions. One is a sign lookup feature, which enables learners to look up signs by searching on English translations. The App also enables learners to practice sign production. This is achieved by users viewing a sign and recording themselves copying the sign; then viewing their own production overlaid on the signing model to see how well their production matches the target in terms of speed, movement, etc. The app is also designed to allow left-handed learners to view the video clips as if they were produced by a left-handed model, in order to help them practice their signing.

While there are a number of on-line sign dictionaries and apps, the BSL SignBank app is unique in providing students with a way of checking their own sign production. It is hoped in the future to automate the checking process, so that students can receive instant feedback on the accuracy of their signing.

For details of both these launches, key a close-eye on our Twitter feed @DCAL_UCL.
DCAL received the award for the most significant research contribution to Deaf studies at the Royal Association for Deaf People’s 175th Birthday Honours Awards Ceremony.

The event, held in February at Mayfair’s Millennium Hotel, brought together members of the Deaf community, major employers, third sector organisations and academics, to pay tribute to the foresight, determination and hard work of the many past, present and future Deaf pioneers.

The 175th birthday awards were an opportunity to celebrate all that is great about Deaf history, language and culture.

The Director of DCAL, Prof. Bencie Woll, said:

“We are really delighted to receive this award from RAD in our 11th year. DCAL has always had as its mission to work together with Deaf people and the Deaf community. This award means a lot because it recognises the impact DCAL has made to the lives of Deaf people over the lifetime of the research centre. We are proud that our research is making a difference to the lives of Deaf children and adults.”

COURSES NOT TO MISS...

**BSL Linguistics**
10am – 4pm, Sat 21 May 2016

The course aims to give BSL teachers, interpreters and other interested people basic background training on the linguistics of BSL. We will introduce BSL phonology (how a BSL sign is formed), BSL morphology (how meaningful elements are combined to make a sign) and introduce the BSL Corpus as a resource for students and teachers

To enrol and make payment please click on the following link: [UCL Online Store](#)

For further information please contact dcalcourses@ucl.ac.uk
Update on specialist neurology centre

You will remember previous updates regarding DCAL’s tireless campaigning and policy activity on securing the long-term future of its Cognitive Disorders Clinic at the National Hospital for Neurology and Neurosurgery. Well, we were recently informed by the Department of Health that the Prescribed Specialist Services Advisory Group (PSSAG) had considered our business case for neurological services for Deaf patients who use BSL and having taking account of the four statutory factors as set out in the National Health Service Act 2006, PSSAG recommended to Ministers that this service was not suitable for national commissioning by NHS England. Ministers, while this was of course disappointing news, there was one line in the letter that has provided encouragement:

“The Group suggested that consideration of other models to support Deaf patients would be more appropriate, for example, specialist interpreters who could travel nationally or work via video conferencing technology.”

DCAL will be exploring the possibility of setting up a pilot remote assessment service for Deaf patients. More information on clinical assessments can be found here.

Two-Day Neural Plasticity Workshop

During infancy, there are specific periods during which the brain has an enhanced capacity for reorganisation in response to environmental inputs: the ‘sensitive’ periods of brain plasticity. Traditionally, it has been thought that reorganisation after a sensitive period is not possible. However, recent research has shown that plasticity is a property of both the developing and adult brain, and that functional recovery after the close of sensitive periods is possible.

Integrating animal and human models, and insights from the study of deafness and language, in this workshop we will discuss mechanisms of brain plasticity throughout the lifespan, its impact on perception and cognition, and the current and future applications for functional adaptation.

This fascinating workshop will take place on the 3rd and 4th June at the Wellcome Collection, 183 Euston Road, London NW1 2BE, UK. The speakers will be: Amir Amedi, Torsten Baldeweg, Pascal Barone, Heidi Baseler, Marina Bedny, Ruth Campbell, David Corina, Douglas Hartley, Andrej Kral, Stephen Lomber, Mairead MacSweeney, Rachel Mayberry, Marcela Peña, Alvaro Pascual-Leone Jerker Rönnberg, Mary Rudner & Anu Sharma.

More information can be found at www.ucl.ac.uk/dcal/dcal-events-publication/plasticityworkshop
You may remember reading in a previous DCAL newsletter about the Speechreading Training and Reading (STaR) project, a research study led by Dr Mairéad MacSweeney, co-director of DCAL.

As part of the STaR project we developed computer games designed to help young deaf children improve their speechreading (lipreading) skills and to help them use these speechreading skills to support their early reading development.

We then ran a study, involving 66 deaf children from 31 different schools across England, to see whether these games were effective. Half of the children played the speechreading games and half of them played games that trained number and maths skills instead. We were then able to compare the speechreading and reading skills of the two groups before and after they played the games to give us a clear picture of the effect the speechreading games had.

We found evidence to suggest that the speechreading training brought benefits to the speechreading skills of the children who completed the training. We are currently revisiting all the children who were involved in the study last year to see if those gains to speechreading lead to downstream gains in reading skills six months later.

In April, Hannah Pimperton (Research Associate on the STaR project) presented the interim results of the study to a meeting of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists South East Clinical Excellence Network in Deafness. This event was attended by over 50 speech and language therapists from across the South East who work with deaf children and young people.

**COURSES NOT TO MISS...**

**Introduction to Notetaking**

9.30am – 4.30pm, 24 May 2016

Notetakers work with deaf and hard of hearing people as well as people with a range of disabilities. They capture faithfully the topic content and essence of the speaker.

This short introductory course focuses on both the manual and electronic skills you need to develop as a professional notetaker and forms an ideal basis to move on to the OCNL Level 3 award.

To enrol and make payment please click on the following link: [UCL Online Store](mailto:UCL Online Store)

For further information please contact [dcalcourses@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:dcalcourses@ucl.ac.uk)
Research Round-Up

How does the brain represent sign and speech?
Dr Mairead MacSweeney and UCL researchers are conducting a new fMRI brain scanning study to find out.

What is the study about? We’ve shown before that sign and speech activate similar parts of the brain. Now we want to find out, using new analysis methods, whether the actual patterns of activation within these regions are similar for sign and speech. This will give us important information for the first time about how language is represented by the brain and whether modality - whether a language is seen or heard - influences this representation.

Interested in being involved?
We are looking for Deaf and hearing native signers aged between 18 and 55 years old. Participants will be paid £15 per hour, and will receive the cost of their travel expenses and a picture of their brain. The experiment will take around 2 and a half hours, but only around one hour of that time will be spent in the scanner.

We will also give you a movie of your brain to keep, like this one!
For more information, please email Sam Evans or Skype Laura Goldberg on: lauravgoldberg

Prof Gary Morgan and Dr Chloë Marshall (UCL Institute of Education) have recently published a paper on specific language impairment in Deaf and hard of hearing children who use sign language.

Around 7% of hearing children of school-starting age have a language learning impairment (specific language impairment or SLI) although there are no concerns about other areas of their development. SLI is of concern because children who are affected by it can continue to have language difficulties into adulthood, and their difficulties are likely to impact negatively on their educational and career attainments.

The research shows that parents, educators and clinicians should all be alert to the possibility that if a deaf child is not making as much progress in their sign language development as would be expected, they might have SLI. Moreover, if the child does have SLI, he or she is also likely to require specialist sign language therapy, since clinical experience suggests that language enrichment interventions alone are not sufficient.

We need specific interventions to support sign language learning in those children and much remains to be accomplished.

Professor Bencie Woll, FBA (UCL) together with Professor Li Wei (UCL Institute of Education) have been awarded a Special Project grant by the British Academy for research on the Cognitive Benefits of Language Learning. The British Academy is concerned with the decline of language learning in schools and its consequences for the future health of the nation. This specially commissioned project will aim to review research evidence on the relationship between language learning (including sign language and immigrant spoken languages), executive function, literacy, and health, as well as creativity, social and affective cognition, and intercultural understanding. The project will include systematic reviews, meta-analysis and meta-synthesis of published research, and use big data and social media to assess public understanding of the cognitive benefits of multilingual skills. A long-term legacy of the project will be a fully annotated and searchable research corpus. The project started in April and is for 18 months.
UCL to host third summer school for Deaf students

In August, University College London will again be running its innovative three day residential summer school exclusively for D/deaf and hard of hearing students from across the UK.

The Discover UCL Summer School, is the only one of its kind run by any UK university and has been developed in a partnership between UCL’s Widening Participation Initiative and the Deafness Cognition and Language Research Centre.

This award winning programme is exclusively for students in year 11 and year 12. The programme gives students the chance to find out more about UCL through active participation in fun academic taster sessions at the university and by allowing them to stay in university halls of residences right in the heart of central London.

Also during the three days, there will be group sessions on student support, including; writing UCAS personal statements, student finance applications, as well as general support available, like BSL interpreters, note takers, etc. and, more importantly, how participants can access that support. Students will also have the opportunity to meet D/deaf and hard of hearing graduates, who will tell them what they need to know about university and what they are up to now.

Quick Facts Box

- The summer school is free of charge to attend
- UCL will cover the cost of your travel, accommodation, all meals and refreshments.
- It runs from Monday 15 to Wednesday 17 August, 2016
- There are 15 spaces available for year 11 and year 12 students
- You must have 100% attendance on the summer school

For more information on the Summer School, please click here to view the programme details.

Applications for the 2016 summer school are now open. Please use the online application form. Alternatively if you require a paper form or more information, then please contact: Paulette Williams: summerschool@ucl.ac.uk or 020 337 0214.

Deadline for submitting applications is Midnight Friday 3rd June 2016
In March, DCAL’s Director for Continuing Professional Development, Robert Adam, was elected onto the British Deaf Association’s (BDA) Board of Trustees. The whole DCAL team are absolutely thrilled by his appointment and we know he will be a superb trustee and great contributor to the BDA.

Commenting on his election, Chair of the BDA, Dr Terry Riley OBE, said:

“We are very much looking forward to welcoming Robert to the Board and benefiting from his excellent expertise in sign language and academic research.”

If you want to know more about Robert and the other members who make up the BDA Board of Trustees, then click here for more details.