

Parliamentary awards - a great success

DCAL held a well attended awards ceremony at the Houses of Parliament for winners of the It's My Future competition.

Sixteen-year-old Eilidh McEwen from Balloch near Cumbernauld came first, receiving her prize of £200 from Rosie Cooper MP. Eilidh expressed hope that learning sign language will be part of the national curriculum and that technological advances would help bring down barriers. She suggested adaptations to iPods to allow people with cochlear implants to hear music more easily and waterproof hearing aids that would enable more deaf people to hear the instructions of a swimming teacher, the whistle of a lifeguard, or just the chatter of their friends.

The objective of the competition was for DCAL, as a leading academic research centre, to engage with young deaf people as potential contributors and participants in deaf research. The Parliamentary event also aimed to raise the profile of DCAL and its research amongst Parliamentarians, civil servants and others with an interest in deafness or higher education research, as well as organisations representing deaf people.

To read the winning entries visit the DCAL website www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk/news/BeingDeaf.pdf



Young people attending the awards ceremony meet Rosie Cooper MP and Malcolm Bruce MP, Chair of the All Party Group on Deafness.

It's My Future: Being Deaf in 2018 competition.

DCAL invited deaf people aged 15–19 to write 1,000 words on how new ideas and research into deafness might have changed their lives by 2018. The competition and awards were held as part of the Economic and Social Research Council's Festival of Social Science..



STOP PRESS—EDM 1191 successful

The Parliamentary authorities look set to improve facilities for Deaf and hard of hearing people in the Palace of Westminster following the DCAL reception. They are now sourcing a new portable induction loop for use at future events following an Early Day Motion that complained that DCAL were charged several hundred pounds for the use of a loop at the reception.

The Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill



DCAL staff agreed a position statement on the Human Fertilization and Embryology Bill at a specially convened meeting on the 13th February 2008.

The statement focuses on the controversial Clause 14 of the bill that many deaf people believe is discriminatory. DCAL staff agreed that this section should be redrafted. It was felt that it was unclear, written in imprecise language and could be used to discriminate against deaf people. An example of this is that the bill advocates a less favourable

IVF service to deaf adults than to non deaf adults. Another major problem was that the Clause did not define abnormality precisely but simply described abnormality in terms of disability, illness or 'other serious medical condition'.

For the full statement visit the DCAL website www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk/news/news.html

Deafness research too has its unchanging landmarks

Professor Ruth Campbell, deputy director of DCAL is retiring. Here she reflects on her career and what has and hasn't changed as an experimental psychologist working in deafness research.

"It's a shock to discover I've been tramping in to Bloomsbury, on and off, for forty-four years - first as a shop girl at Dillons (now Waterstones), then a Birkbeck postgrad and a post-doc at UCL Psychology; later still at Human Communication Science, on Wakefield Street and, for the last two years, DCAL at Gordon Square. The odd thing is, how much seems the same: Woburn Square and Gordon Square have been gently beautified in their greenness, but no buildings have been pulled down, and the plane trees which make me sneeze every May are about as tall as they ever were. Tim from Waterstones is still enjoying his lunch in the square; and the smell of the swimming pool still wafts out of the ULU building on Malet Street.



"Deafness research too has its unchanging landmarks. The same old questions are still being posed: how best to educate a deaf child? what is the status of sign language? But around these unchanging poles swirl new developments. Cochlear implantation is now a real option for a deaf child born in the UK. What will that mean for deafness research?

Psychology, the discipline in which I was trained, now informs neuroscience and computational approaches to language processing. On the horizon, approaching fast, are genetic analyses - in relation to both deafness and to language development. But watch out for another recent development: look both ways when you cross the road at Torrington Place to Woburn Square: the bike lane is lethal"

DCAL makes progress in developing assessment tools for BSL

DCAL is well on its way to developing normative data and assessment tools that can be used to help better understand the causes of differences between how different groups of deaf adults and children use BSL. These will be useful for teachers, interpreters, social workers and language therapists.

DCAL has set up an online study to collect normative data on a set of 300 lexical signs of BSL. The set of measures that have been normed are ratings for the familiarity, iconicity, and age of acquisition of BSL lexical signs. How this works is that participants rate a set of 300 signs for familiarity and iconicity on a 7-point scale. They also estimate their age of acquisition for each of their signs. Data have come from a wide range of BSL signers all over the UK using an online study. The results and full video database will be published later this year.



In addition to collecting information about BSL signs, DCAL is also developing a BSL assessment test for deaf adults. We are doing this because although there are some BSL language assessments for children, there are currently very few tools for assessing sign language proficiency in adults. We are creating tools which will assess both comprehension and production of BSL phonology, morphology and grammar and are currently collecting data on a Sentence Judgement Task. These tools will give us a standard for proficiency/skill in BSL, and will be used by all of the other research strands in DCAL.

Visit the DCAL website for more information
www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk/Research/themes/themes1.html.

Can you help with DCAL research?

We are currently looking for participants for our research project on judgements about BSL sentences. If you decide to participate - you will be shown some BSL sentences on a computer. You will be asked to judge if you feel the BSL sentence is “right” or not. There are also two screening tests: a visual-spatial skills test and a reading test.

In order to participate, you must be Deaf, British-born, and use British Sign Language as your main language. You must also have learned BSL before age 13. Other restrictions apply; for more info, please contact us.

The Sentence Judgement Task and the screening tests will take about 1 hour of your time total. Testing takes place at DCAL in central London. Testing in other locations outside the London area may be possible; contact us for more information. Would you be interested in participating in this research project?

If so, please contact: Ramas Rentelis
SMS +44 (0)793 222 5818 Fax +44 (0)207 679 8691 Email: sslyrre@ucl.ac.uk

Deaf people in the Dock

Deaf people on trial were granted the right to an interpreter as early as 1725, according to Old Bailey records examined by DCAL. The use of family and friends to interpret court proceedings later switched to deaf teachers and eventually written testimony, which may have disadvantaged the less educated 'deaf and dumb' at the very time that British Sign Language was emerging.



The study, published in the latest issue of the journal *Sign Language Studies*, charts the history of signing and interpreting in court proceedings pulled from Old Bailey records online.

Professor Bencie Woll, Director of DCAL commented on the research "With the release of Old Bailey records online, we have been able to explore the treatment of 'deaf and dumb' people by the legal system in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Many of the issues raised are pertinent today, including finding interpreters for signing deaf people in the courts. In many cases, family and friends were used as well as employers (masters to deaf servants). Later, we see teachers from the London Asylum for the Deaf and Dumb, founded in 1792, being brought in to communicate in the courts.

"The central criminal court appears to have had quite an enlightened view, even though there is little evidence that these people 'dumb by the visitation of god' were using a fully fledged sign language. The court usually held no objections to signing, gesturing and motioning, provided that this could be interpreted to the satisfaction of the jury. This rationale still operates largely today, where people are brought in to interpret for deaf people without necessarily being qualified or registered with a professional body.

"British Sign Language can trace its roots to the creation of formal deaf education, the irony being that as deaf children received greater education and as BSL became a full language, the status of 'deaf and dumb' people appears to have declined in the courts, just as their language and community were beginning to develop."

Gallaudet Presidential Visit

On 21st May President Robert Davila of Gallaudet University stopped off at UCL for an Open Forum hosted by the British Deaf Association. Gallaudet University in the USA is the only university founded especially for Deaf students, and is the world leader in educational programmes and career development for deaf and hard-of-hearing undergraduate students.

Deafness Cognition and Language (DCAL) Research Centre
University College London, 49 Gordon Square, London, WC1H 0PD

Telephone: +44(0)20 7679 8679
Fax: +44(0)20 7679 8691

Minicom: +44(0)20 7679 8693
Website: www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk

