

Christmas Newsletter - December 2019

2019 has been a year of change and growth at DCAL! We are pleased to announce that Kearsy Cormier has been appointed as Deputy Director to assist in the leadership of DCAL. We were also delighted that Velia Cardin and Fiona Kyle joined the DCAL team in July 2019. Their appointment demonstrates UCL's commitment to supporting DCAL into the future. [Velia's expertise](#) in the field of crossmodal neuroplasticity and [Fiona's expertise](#) in literacy development in deaf children will enable DCAL to further strengthen our world-leading teaching and research in the field of Deafness, Cognition and Language.



Research update

2019 has been a very productive year in many research areas. Below are just some of our most exciting highlights. You can find information about all our projects [here](#) and can also [sign up](#) if you want to be involved in future research.

The deaf and signing brain

The left hemisphere is 'dominant' for sign language production in most deaf adults, just as it is for spoken language production in most hearing adults. We've now shown that the left hemisphere is also 'dominant' in deaf children (5-11yr olds) during language production (read the paper [here](#)). Future research is needed to examine at what age this dominance appears and whether this depends on language experience. In exciting new research we found that 'an orange isn't always an orange!' Patterns of brain responses were not the same when hearing native signers saw ORANGE in BSL as when they heard 'orange' in English. This intriguing finding suggests that representations of sign and speech may be less similar than we have previously thought. You can read a summary

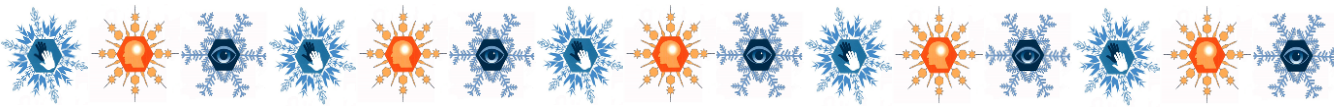
[here](#) or you can access the full paper [here](#).

We are also continuing work on our project "Does the deaf auditory cortex have a role in cognition?" We are currently investigating whether parts of the brain that have a role in perceiving sounds in hearing people can be involved in memory, vision and touch in deaf people. Please [get in touch](#) if you want to [volunteer](#) in this [research](#).

Language development in deaf children

We have developed our language and literacy research with deaf children this year. We are excited to have completed the first year of data collection for a longitudinal study of preschool language and literacy skills in deaf and hearing children. The project will follow a large group of children over the next two years to see how their preschool language skills are related to later reading skills.

We also developed a speechreading (lipreading) training game (<http://star-demo.research.sc/>) for young deaf children. We showed that it led to improvements in speechreading and, to some extent, speech phonological skills (read the paper [here](#)). We plan to develop these games further as we hope they can impact reading development.



Linguistics research

Lots of new linguistics projects started this year. With computer scientists from the University of Surrey and the University of Oxford we are working on machine translation from BSL to English. We are also documenting how BSL signers quote and demonstrate actions of others when in conversation ('enactment') and continuing our research on BSL syntax, interaction in BSL conversation, and language attitudes. We'll start reporting on these projects on the next year, so stay tuned!

Dementia

Dementia is usually detected late in deaf people, partly because of little knowledge about deafness and BSL. We are working on a project with the University of Westminster to improve the diagnosis of dementia in deaf people. The project uses a screening tool to identify changes in facial expressions and signing space in signers with mild cognitive impairments (MCI) or dementia. Early analyses show that the system is over 85% accurate in identifying the early signs of the disease!

Studying at DCAL

In 2017 we campaigned for BSL to be recognised as a 'Modern Foreign Language' at UCL. This label meant that BSL courses were recognised in the same way as foreign languages like French or Spanish, and also indigenous minority languages like Welsh. We're delighted that this recognition has led to a big increase in the number of students at UCL taking BSL courses. There are now 3 different BSL level 1 classes running, and also a level 2 class. We will continue to promote these classes to raise awareness of BSL in the UCL community.



We are also proud to announce that this year we have begun a [new affiliate programme in Psychology and Language Sciences](#). This allows undergraduate students from overseas to study at UCL for one or two terms, with an option to specialise in Sign Language and Deaf Studies. Students can take the modules that we run at DCAL or other modules from across UCL. We are always thrilled to welcome new students, so if you are interested in visiting and studying at DCAL, please [get in touch!](#)

In addition to these new developments, we continue to run successful degree-level modules such as 'Sign Language Linguistics', 'Deaf Culture' and 'Deafness, Cognition and Language' and modules on interpreting and live captioning. For postgraduate students, we offer the [MSc in Language Sciences with specialisation in Sign Language and Deaf Studies](#), which attracts students from around the world.

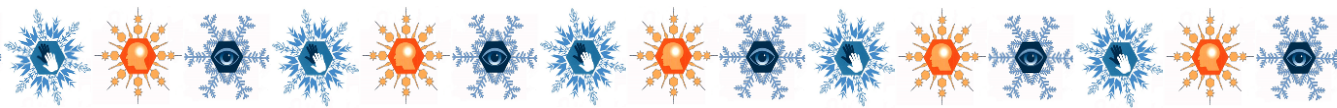
Overall, this has been a very successful year for increasing awareness and teaching about deafness and BSL. Find out more about the courses we offer on our [website](#).

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)/ Summer Schools/ Short Courses

CPD and Short Courses

This year we're very proud to have launched our suite of five online courses '[Deaf Awareness: Online Courses for Health Professionals](#)', accredited for CPD by professional bodies (e.g., the Royal College of Physicians and Royal College of Nursing). Manjula Patrick developed these much needed resources and was rewarded for her hard work with a "UCL Innovation Award". These





courses can make a big difference to deaf and hard of hearing people's access to health services, **please help by spreading the word to your GP, your colleagues and any other health professionals who could benefit from this training.**

The CPD team have also been busy running courses and seminars on inclusive education, international sign, working as a deaf interpreter, deaf awareness, the linguistics of BSL, and language acquisition and reading. We will continue offering these in 2020. If you are interested in attending, email us at dcalcourses@ucl.ac.uk.

We also worked with our school partners to deliver sessions on the history of BSL, and we co-hosted an event on communication support together with the National Registers of Communication Professionals working with Deaf and Deafblind People (NRCPD). Many of our CPD activities would not be possible without our community partners – big thanks for your support and valuable contributions!

Summer schools

Summers are always busy at DCAL! This year, we ran two summer schools: a 'BSL Summer School' for ASL students from the University of Pittsburgh and a Research Skills Summer School attended by 11 students from around Europe.

['Discover UCL for deaf and hard of hearing year 11 and 12 students'](#) ran for the 6th year with overwhelmingly positive feedback and was nominated for a Business Disability Forum award. **In April 2020, we will expand this by piloting an event for parents of deaf teenagers, to help them support their child through university.** [Contact us](#) if you are interested in participating in any of these events in the future.



Events in 2019

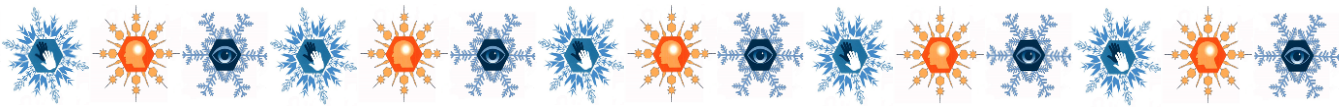
This year was the [40th anniversary of the first BSL Research Workshop](#), and we were proud to host an event in November to celebrate this milestone together with Heriot-Watt University and the British Deaf Association. A full day of celebrations saw pioneers and current BSL researchers giving us an account of the advances in BSL research over the last 40 years, and the impact it has had on the British deaf community. A short film to mark the 40th anniversary celebration will be available soon.

We had a great time with the BBC See Hear team in October, when they visited DCAL to learn about the deaf brain and our current project on memory, vision and touch. You can watch the episode and find out more about the research [here](#).

In November, together with colleagues from City, University of London, we held an ESRC Festival of Social Science event "Talking about reading". This promoted understanding of language and literacy related activities, and many teachers of the deaf and speech and language therapists attended.



We have great plans for engagement activities next year, so keep an eye on our [twitter](#) and [facebook](#) page for all our upcoming events!



Exciting News

The Department for Education (DfE) has finally commissioned work on the development of a GCSE in BSL (for both deaf and hearing children), which we hope will start in 2022. Robert Adam and Bencie Woll are members of the consultancy team developing the curriculum for the DfE, with the help of input from other DCAL colleagues. The first meeting with the Minister for Education and other stakeholders is due to take place on 4th December 2019.

Finally, we are very proud that this year DCAL was awarded a Legacy Centre grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (2019-2024), following on from our successful ESRC Research Centre status from 2006 to 2016. This provides funding to ensure that we can maintain and promote our unique research resources – [DCAL Assessment Portal](#), [DCAL Research Data Archive](#), [BSL Corpus](#), [BSL SignBank](#), and the [DCAL Research Participant Database](#). It will also enable us to provide even better information about our research to those not in academia. Next year we will be creating English and BSL summaries of all of our new research. Coming soon to [twitter](#) and [facebook](#) – do look out for it!



Happy Christmas from all of us at DCAL

We hope you enjoyed reading our highlights.
If you want to know any more about any of these topics, please do [contact us](#).
Thank you for all of your support and interest in our work over 2019.
We look forward to working together in 2020!

