

Faculty news

Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences

Major research grant for LSBU and Open University team



LSBU's Dr Lucy Henry and her research partner Dr David Messer of the Open University have won a grant worth £220,000 from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) for their work with children with specific language impairment

Although specific language impairment, or SLI, gets far less publicity than disorders like autism and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), it nevertheless affects around 7% of children. Typically, children with SLI will have significant problems with language while other aspects of their development are perfectly normal. The project aims to investigate the impact of SLI on children's ability to carry out a range of activities known as 'executive functioning' tasks.

Lucy Henry explains. 'Recent research suggests that, in children with SLI, there are abnormalities in the parts of the brain used to carry out executive functioning tasks – tasks that require us to plan steps in order to achieve a specific outcome. Our project will compare the performance of children with SLI with that of their non-SLI peers and look at how the condition affects their ability to perform visual and spatial tasks as well as language-based ones.

'The aim is to identify links between different aspects of executive functioning skills and specific language weaknesses like poor vocabulary or grammar. That information will be invaluable to speech therapists working with children with SLI. We are delighted to have this opportunity to further our understanding of this condition and to build on LSBU's strong tradition of research into developmental disorders.'

The project will start in January 2008. For more information, contact Lucy Henry on henrylc@lsbu.ac.uk

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Lives and times

Timescapes is a unique research study aimed at creating the first ever large-scale archive of information about people's everyday lives and relationships

Timescapes was launched in February 2007, with £3.8 million of funding from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). The study, which will run for the next five years, will explore the dynamics of personal relationships and identities in an attempt to understand the significance of time in people's lives.

But what really makes Timescapes unique is not the subject-matter, but the nature of the research itself, as LSBU's Professor of Social Research and study co-director Janet Holland explains. 'This will be the first time qualitative research has been carried out over such an extended period of time and with such a large sample – around 400 people will be involved. It should give us a unique insight into how people understand and interpret their own lives and how those lives are shaped by changing circumstances.'

LSBU is one of five universities taking part in Timescapes. Leeds University is taking the lead, with Dr Bren Neale acting as project director. The other consortium members are the universities of Edinburgh and Cardiff and the Open University. Each is responsible for one or two of the study's seven projects, which look at different stages of people's lives and different types of relationships. LSBU will be working on the siblings and friends project, as well as archiving a major study of youth transitions, 'Inventing Adulthoods'. One of the key aims of the study is to develop a comprehensive archive of qualitative data. This will provide a valuable resource for policy-makers, showing them the impact policies in areas like education, health and welfare are having on the ground and for practitioners such as teachers and health professionals. Other researchers will also be able to use the data for secondary analysis.

'Timescapes is a truly unique project,' says Janet, 'and I'm delighted that LSBU is involved in it. The grant is worth £900,000 to us over the next five years so the financial benefits are clear, but the project will also keep our profile high and enable us to strengthen links with the other universities. It's very collaborative. We're holding regular residential meetings plus seminars and workshops so we can share our knowledge as we go along. That way, we can make sure Timescapes is more than the sum of its parts.'