

# Its My Future: Being Deaf in 2018

Its My Future: Being Deaf in 2018 was a competition for young Deaf people to write about what they thought should be the future for deaf research in ten or even twenty years time.

The competition was held by UCL's Deafness, Cognition and Language Centre (DCAL).

All the entries provided a real insight into the hopes and expectations of young Deaf people for the 21st century.

This short report highlights these expectations and brings together the common themes from all the entries as well as publishing the winning entry .

The competition was judged by Malcolm Bruce MP, Chair of the All Party Group on Deafness; Professor Ruth Campbell, Deputy Director at DCAL; Tyron Woolfe, Deputy Director for Children and Young People, National Deaf Children's Society and Guido Gybels, Director of New Technology at RNID (Royal National Institute for the Deaf).

Its My Future: Being Deaf in 2018 was held as part of The Festival of Social Science week The festival is run by the Economic and Social Research Council to celebrate some of the country's leading social science research, as well as highlighting the ways in which social science makes a difference to everyday lives. It runs from March 7th to 16th, alongside National Science and Engineering Week.



## Wining Entries

### First Prize

**Eilidh McEwen, Glasgow**

### Runner up

**Doug Dunn, Bristol**

### Runner up

**Rose Tomlinson, Glasgow**

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All of the entries were of a high quality and will contribute to DCAL research over the coming years.

Collectively they highlighted that for Deaf people to achieve equality by 2018 there would need to be a change in society's attitude towards deafness.

These young people wanted respect for who they are and to be included in every aspect of their communities.

## Technology

By 2018 it was hoped technology would have advanced to a place where it can help support Deaf people make the most of their lives in a number of situations. Technology is already being used to break down barriers and increase participation. Many of the entries pointed to the greater availability or use of existing technology.

### Hearing Aids

Young people wanted more advanced hearing aids. They wanted to be able to use them in crowds, in water and even when resting on a pillow. Being able to participate in swimming lessons safely or taking part in a conversation at a 'sleepover' were the kinds of practical aspirations that young Deaf people pointed to.

### Text / BSL adaptations

Although some of the entries highlighted potential for improvements in the existing speech to text / BSL technology, the majority of young people simply wanted better access to what is already available. Deaf people will, it was hoped, be able to watch TV, DVDs and films at cinemas which are subtitled. Ideas for improving technology included holographic signers as well as subtitles, and taxis having text machines to enable deaf people to tell drivers where to go.

### Cochlear Implants

A number of entries mentioned that they hoped Cochlear Implants could be improved. Ideas included developing technology to enable people to test what it is like to have a cochlear implant before they decide to have one fitted through to being able to connect the implant directly to an iPod .

## Sign Language

Many of the entries put recognition and promotion of British Sign language at the top of their agenda for 2018. Ideas included

- Teaching sign language in school as part of the national curriculum
- Increased numbers of doctors, nurses, and police who can use BSL to communicate with deaf people
- Staff in shops, cinemas, restaurants and banks to also learn basic BSL.
- The rights of BSL users to be protected

## Inclusion

In 2018 young deaf people want to be equal. They want to be included in society and have the same opportunities as everyone else.

Each of the entries had a different take on how this would happen. From greater integration between hearing and deaf people through to more deaf people being visible in advertising.

# The winning entry

## Eilidh McEwen

### Its my future: Being Deaf in 2018

When I was little, the sounds of music and others talking used to fascinate me, even though it was often an incomprehensible babble until the person speaking would turn and talk to me, face to face and I could lip-read them.

However in the last fifteen years huge improvements have been made in hearing aids and cochlear implants. For people who are deaf, new and improved technology can help tremendously and in the future it would appear there are going to be huge leaps forward in this area. Innovative ideas and study seem to point to schemes that could improve deaf people's lives significantly such as more sophisticated hearing aids and cochlear implants, which would both pick up more wavelengths of sound and be able to help hearing in a crowd, something which today is of great importance.

Raising awareness of deafness among other people is also a big part of letting deaf people feel they can be included in society. Teaching hearing people about how to communicate with deaf people in ways such as signing or lip reading could help deaf people feel accepted in society and if it were made part of the National Curriculum awareness could be taught from a younger age to children who remain largely unaware of the difficulty some deaf children find in hearing others talking. Through the national curriculum it would reach a wider range of people all over Britain and widen education about deafness.

One of my main ideas helps solve a difficulty that I think would help change deaf people's lives for the better. For many deaf people, not being able to hear when in the water or near water can be a big problem. It means you cannot hear someone calling your name or the sharp warning whistle of the lifeguard. If you are learning to swim, shouted warnings are not noticed and this could be risky, especially to the young inexperienced swimmer. It also is a disadvantage if you want to take part in water sports such as kayaking and water-skiing as aids need to be removed and instructions become very difficult to hear and understand.

However with technology improving all the time, perhaps a type of waterproof hearing aid could be invented that could be worn underwater and still allow the wearer to hear as they do on land. This could bring lots of advantages because it would mean if anyone was in danger the deaf person could hear the warnings. It would also open up a lot more opportunities for children who are deaf to be able to join in at swimming lessons without worrying about not being able to hear a word anyone said.

Personally, I found it hard when I was on holiday in the summer and met some friends, yet had to keep putting my aids in and out every time I wanted to go in the pool and then speak to my friends. It was also hard at the sea, because I could not hear what everyone was talking about. Waterproof hearing aids could help deaf people a lot. As well as hearing aids, it could be invented for cochlear implants and other types of aids so all different types of hearing loss could be benefited by waterproof equipment.

A way in which waterproof hearing aids could be brought about would also have other enormous benefits. By putting hearing aids or implants just under the skin behind the ear, instead of sitting inside or on top of the ear, the equipment would be underneath the skin and therefore waterproof. Other things that would be helpful are the fact that these aids would not be visible or need adjustment for size. Although new technology and materials would perhaps be needed, I think that within the next ten or twenty years it would be plausible.

A step in the other direction, away from technological advancements towards biological ones could perhaps lead to a cure for sensorineural deafness in the cochlear. Nowadays it is possible to grow skin grafts and scientists are even exploring the theory of growing hearts so why not hairs in the ear? Certain techniques, involving DNA, could be used to re-grow nerve endings or hairs in the cochlear, which would essentially help deaf people as they could hear a lot more, perhaps even leading, eventually, to total independence from aids of any kind. Within the next ten or twenty years, I think that this might be possible as ten years is a long time in terms of technological progress, especially in today's rapidly advancing world. Maybe this could help to reduce the extent of hearing loss deaf people have, improve their hearing and perhaps, lead to an eventual cure for sensorineural deafness.

Another idea I had is a lot more basic and seems to bring a lot more benefits. When in the house, I find it hard to hear the phone ringing or the doorbell. What about people who are severely deaf and cannot hear the smoke alarm if it goes off or the quiet beep of a cooker? Instead of using flashing lights, a device could vibrate whenever an alarm went off, telling the deaf person that someone was at the door or that there was smoke coming from somewhere. It could be worn around the wrist, in the form of a watch or bracelet and could be used to alert the deaf person. Even better for me personally, it could be used as an alarm to wake up in the morning instead of having to set my phone on vibrate mode.

I think it would be fantastic if technology that enabled a person with hearing aids to hear the lyrics in a song could be invented. Music is a big part of most teenagers' lives and for many deaf people it is frustrating missing out on that. More refined hearing aids that could pick up the words in a song; a loud place or even a crowd of people would be very helpful. People with cochlear implants have a lead that can be attached to an i-pod and allows them to hear the music. Perhaps one could be made for wearers of hearing aids or even for the newer equipment of the future so that all deaf people can listen to music.

In the next decade or two, I believe that life will change for deaf people dramatically as more and more technological leaps are made. Perhaps there will even someday be a day when I or any deaf person can turn to the person sitting next to them, on a noisy crowded train, without worry of not being able to hear them and say, "Oh I can't get that song out of my head."

# Runner up entry

## Doug Dunn

Hearing loss is not a new thing. It is one of the accidents, which nature has not yet mended.

However, if we look at factories, we see much the same thing occurs; a large factory producing many thousands of chocolate bars a day is sure to have at least a hundred go wrong in one day, and yet it would not hinder the factory in any way.

I see nature as like that; it produces many people a day and at least a few a day will turn out with some abnormality, whether it be physical, mental or both. I do not believe, however, that it is in any way a hindrance, but more of a challenge. A challenge is always helpful, because a person without an aim is a very bored person indeed. This said, it would not be fair to start the game without a level playing-board. Hearing-aids, implants and other such gadgets, allow the person affected to lead a perfectly normal life; and as we see before us, these electronic machines are developing at astonishing rate.

As historians often like to comment, it is simpler to look at the past to see what is coming, this also applies to technology. Who would have thought that the Playstation One and Playstation Two could be followed by the aptly named Playstation Three without knowing of sequels and improved gadgets from the recent past. It is difficult to use this method to predict whether in the future we will be able to cure hearing loss completely or whether the inevitable gadgets will always be there. I, myself, fear that it will be impossible to fight nature on this one. People with damaged faces may be able to have plastic surgery, but repairing hearing loss would be much more difficult as it is not superficial but must actually work!

Possibly there will be a small microphone placed inside the ear which cannot be seen or felt except in a certain place—perhaps just inside the curl of the ear. Radio-aids, I dearly hope, will be extinct, possibly in a special museum for people to gasp at and wonder how we managed to carry such a dead weight. The hearing-aids, I think, would be able to zone in on one person speaking automatically. There is research ahead for regeneration of cochlear hairs, which is brilliant, but the cost of the research is phenomenal and of course, to buy the implants would be very expensive.

As to attitudes towards those with deafness, it is my hopeful wish that people would not see hearing-aids as a disability but something that is not noticeable, not someone that brings a tear to your eye as you see them struggle off into the sunset applauded by a crowd of well-wishers. Get real. Life is not something you want to be paraded on. In the basic story, hearing aids are a small machine that fits into your ear which lets you hear. It's not a sign saying "I'm disabled, pity me", it's not a sign saying "I'm weaker than you, bully me", it's not a sign at all. Finis. Deaf people should not be told that they cope really well, they should not be singled out for praise nor bullying. A hearing-aid raises us to the level so we can communicate with non-deaf people.

It would be fascinating to have a deaf Prime Minister or a deaf soldier—perhaps they could show we're not at all different. This is my dearest wish. When a friend says that they had forgotten I was deaf, my day brightens that little bit. At least there's one person who realizes the true meaning of hearing loss.

I don't think cochlear implants will have changed much, unless for some reason a massive leap forward happens, but I believe the visible receiver will also be much smaller, and possibly in an array of colours to match hair colour. However, I do not think that they will be able to fully cure it as again the technology is beyond us.

I believe that BSL could quite laudably be one of the wider choices at GCSE but possibly not A-Level as it is not quite "serious" enough for that grade. It would be extremely interesting to learn BSL at GCSE, and I would be sorely tempted as I feel almost ashamed when my friends ask me if I know Sign Language and I answer in the negative. Being interested in the theatre, the facial expressions intrigue me, and I would enjoy learning BSL.

I have discussed attitudes towards deaf people, but now I wish to discuss attitudes between deaf people. I am frequently annoyed by letters I receive asking me to deaf persons bowling and deaf persons model making etc. etc. not because I don't believe it would not be enjoyable, but because I do not see myself and other deaf people as being in a group. A group is something you join, that you make the decision. Why should I be forced to take part in something just because there are people also with hearing losses; it's comparable to having a bowling night for people with green eyes, or blonde hair. Glasses could be seen as a disability too! Needless to say—I rarely attend these events. I would think this sense of being in a club would fade with new technology being brought in as the viewable objects of hearing loss would fade and become smaller.

In 2018, I believe that technology will have moved on beyond many people's wildest imaginings, but my real hope is that deaf people will be allowed to continue living normal lives and gaining achievement for the things that they have rightfully earned. Hearing-aids are not curses, nor are they blessings. Hearing-aids, and cochlear implants, loops and radio-aids are machines that allow us to live our lives.

# Runner up entry

## Rose Tomlinson

### Rose's diary

1st January 2018

It's the first day back at work and my hearing is as bad as ever again, because of the Christmas holidays my 3d audio visual glasses have not turned up yet .Reading the article about them it sounded amazing I just hope that they are effective as they say they are .the advert says " these audio visual glasses appear 3d in front of your eyes. They are a pair of glasses that pick up on the things that people are saying to you, acting as hearing aids, but the words appear 3D in front of your face. I cant wait until they come my life is going to change!!

I am not going to feel the odd one out because people do not say anything about people wearing glasses but always seem to make a big fuss if someone wears a hearing aid.

3<sup>rd</sup> January 2018

I started back at work today glasses still haven't arrived yet but fortunately there is a new system called audio visual texter. This is going to help me with my work because it means I will be able to look away from the customer and the system will pick up what they are saying and text it onto a screen for me.

6<sup>th</sup> January 2018

my friend alanna was over today and she was telling me how much trouble she was having with her baby at night because she could not hear her crying because she has to take out her hearing aid, this makes her so upset and angry with herself because she feels it makes her a bad mother because she can not hear her baby cry. I read in a magazine that there is a watch which she can wear when she takes out her hearing aids at night. The watch vibrates when the baby cries. This wakes her up to attend to the baby. The mother wears the watch which is connected to a voice amplifier which the baby wears. The amplifier is disguised as a teddy bear.