



# It's my future: being deaf in 2019

The *It's my future* competition asked young deaf people to write about their ideas on how research might change things for deaf people by 2019 or even by 2029.

The competition was run by Deafness Research UK, in association with the ESRC's Deafness, Cognition and Language Research Centre (DCAL) at UCL.

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. The winning entries are also included.

The competition was judged by Rt Hon Malcolm Bruce MP, chair of the All Party Group on Deafness, Vivienne Michael, Chief Executive of Deafness Research UK, Dr Lisa Nolan, a Research Fellow at the UCL Ear Institute and Professor Gary Morgan, Co-Director at DCAL.

## Winning Entries

### 12-14 years

#### First Prize

Helen Thomas, Plymouth

#### Runners-up

Calvin Black, Glasgow

Hannah Norfor, Slough

### 15-18 years

#### First Prize

Jordan McGrath, Ilkeston

#### Runner-up

George Greenway, Exmouth



**We were very impressed by the quality of the entries. They will contribute to the work of Deafness Research UK and DCAL over the coming years.**

These young people want to be able to be included in every aspect of their community. They want technology, design and medical research to work as hard for them as for mainstream society.

### Sign Language

Many of the young people thought that there should be more signed events and performances, as well as much greater learning of sign language. They wanted to see it as part of the school curriculum and to have phrase books available for parents and friends of deaf children.

### Cochlear Implants and Hearing Aids

Young people want improvements to cochlear implants and hearing aids. They want them to be waterproof, not only in the rain but at swimming pools and in the sea so that they don't get left out of activities with their friends. They want them to be smaller and not so prone to falling off during sports activities.

New ways of powering devices should be researched, with lots of ideas about solar power being used, maybe with panels or microchips built into the arms of glasses, hair bands or clipped on scarves and collars.

The appearance of devices was also important, with ideas for cochlear implants to be covered with skin grafts, making them invisible and waterproof.

There was also hope that devices would be developed so that they could focus in on specific conversations or sounds and help to eliminate background noise.

The young people also called for companies to work together to make sure that research improves things for deaf children in the next decade.

### Subtitles

The development of subtitling services was also important, including an idea for glasses or contact lenses to be available that show subtitles throughout a performance. There should be more subtitled cinema showings, and DVDs should have a choice of subtitles or provide sign language translation.

One direction the young people could see for medical research was a focus on developing ways to replace parts of the ear, with the aid of improved medical imaging technology to enable doctors to visualise what's happening inside the ear and in the brain.

There was also an expectation that there should be research to find more of the genes behind deafness and to extend gene therapy so that specific genes can be replaced.

## Inclusion

These young people had strong ideas on what needs to happen in the next ten or twenty years to ensure equality and inclusion in education and the wider world. They want all classrooms to have sound fields, and all children to learn signing so they can communicate with their deaf peers. They want to raise awareness of deafness.

They want all new buildings to have inbuilt loop systems or sound fields, and for staff at shops, cafes, restaurants and most importantly medical professionals to have deaf awareness training. We need enough services for deaf people of all ages to get the support they need in order to live an independent life.

# The winning entries

Helen Thomas

Jordan McGrath

## It's my future: being deaf in 2019

### **Helen Thomas, age 14, Plymouth**

I would like to think, that in the next 20 years there will be great advances in helping deaf

children/adults. As a cochlear implant user I would expect advances in this area to be more exciting, maybe along the lines of putting the implant and processor under the skin and therefore eliminating the need for an external processor, or an implant that tunes in to the conversation you are listening to, and eliminates surrounding sounds (very science fiction!)

**"I would like to see all classrooms equipped with the necessary sound fields."**

Or maybe gene therapy can play a part, with replacing the faulty gene, I along with my family, have had blood taken to see which gene is responsible for my deafness, this is something I would think research would focus on.

On communicating with deaf people, it would be great if a degree of sign language could be on the school time table. It's great to learn to sign, you never know when you will need

it. It's important to make people aware how difficult it is for deaf people, like with all sensory impairments, "making people aware" is very important.

I would like to see all classrooms equipped with the necessary sound fields.

And finally here is one crazy idea - what about glasses/or contact lenses that when worn would show subtitles maybe in a cinema or TV.

So this is my vision for the future, I hope it helps!

### **Jordan McGrath, age 15, Ilkeston**

There are 9 million deaf people in the U.K, 34,000 of which are children and young people. It doesn't matter whether a deaf person has mild deafness, moderate deafness, severe deafness or is profoundly deaf there are always solutions such as technology equipment such as hearing aids or cochlear implants. There are other solutions such as lip reading and sign language.

Two million people in the U.K have hearing aid/s. Four million people don't have hearing aid/s - this is a high number and I think that people who want to have a hearing aid/s or cochlear implants should investigate what equipment is useful for them. It would lead to an easier way of life. They would benefit from it hugely.

I think that deaf people should be treated equally as hearing people: examples, more subtitled shows at cinemas, interpreters at shows, pantomimes and other public places where a deaf person needs help with communication in some way. I think that these services should be funded by the government. I also think that there should be more deaf awareness taught around the U.K: examples, staff in supermarkets, high street shops, churches, restaurants, cafes and the most important of all are doctors, hospitals, dentists and other medical care centres. I would benefit hugely if this problem was solved because me myself as a deaf person can struggle at times when I go out to public places such as shops. Another thing is that new buildings that are being built should be built with sound fields or

**"I, along with my family, have had blood taken to see which gene is responsible for my deafness"**

loop systems. More DVD'S should include either a choice of subtitles or a signer. I find that many DVD'S that my family have bought in the past have no subtitles so therefore I can't watch it. Also modern mobile phones as seen in shops should contain all the features that a deaf person needs.

“I think there should be more deaf awareness taught around the U.K. e.g. high street shops, churches, restaurants and the most important of all are doctors, hospitals, dentists and other medical care centres.”

I think that a lot of deaf people would benefit from a waterproof hearing-aid/s which has different levels for different kinds of deafness. These waterproof hearing aids could be used in swimming pools in the sea and other wet areas when it's raining. This way they wouldn't miss out talking to and hearing friends/family or even a deaf person who can't communicate. They would have to be a small object that fits into the ear so that they don't fall out and get lost. Normal digital and analogue hearing aids are not allowed to get wet.

I also think that higher powered hearing aids should be created for profoundly deaf people. It would be loud enough so that a deaf person can hear all the correct sounds that are being said and this could improve their speech. Also in shops and other public places they may hear what the person is saying more clearly. It could be electrically chargeable although this wouldn't be good for the environment, so high powered batteries could be made.

Also a person with no hearing or little hearing should be provided with a choice of having a hearing dog for the deaf, this helps deaf people have a more independent life and not rely on others too much. A higher local service should be provided for deaf people if they are in need of something or having difficulties with something. They should be provided with a person who works at that local area and is able to get in touch with them as confidently as possible. They should always have support no matter how old they are.

## The runners-up

### Calvin Black ■ Hannah Norfor

### George Greenway

“When it's raining the cochlear implant breaks...”

#### **Calvin Black, age 13, Glasgow**

My first problem is when I am running about or playing football, my cochlear implant (C.I.) keeps falling off and I get quite annoyed. Also when I am in the swimming pool, I have to take it off which means I can't hear any of my mates talking to me and that makes me feel left out and I don't enjoy swimming without it.

My last difficulty is when it's raining the C.I. breaks because of the water which means my mum or dad has to take me to Crosshouse Hospital which is in Kilmarnock and I live in Abronhill, and also using my mum and dad's diesel and it's causing a lot of pollution. To drive down there it takes me a minimum of two hours just to get there and I am fed up in the car doing nothing and hearing nothing. I also get angry because I need to leave my friends and when I get back it's too dark to go back out.

When I heard about this competition, it really got me thinking what I could do to solve my problems so I thought up this idea of making the C.I into a small, flat square the same colour as your flesh, right behind your ear so no one can see it. For swimming you could cover it with

a skin graft so the water can't get in and it can't float away. To turn on and off, you click your fingers once for on and twice for off and then to power it, scientists could make a C.I charging base with Bluetooth and when the new C.I is running out of charge, the Bluetooth in the C.I charging base would find your C.I and charge it automatically.

### **Hannah Norfor, age 12, Slough**

Hello, I am going to explain about how to improve deaf people's hearing and people's disabilities and first I am going to be talking about what they should be doing about cochlear implants. For these implants they should still have these going into your head but instead have them a bit smaller so it can properly feel more comfortable and not stand out so much.

Next for sign language, for this we should have a small-sized machine that can have a voice inside it and then people can sign and what they say can come out in words on the machine so people that are not deaf can know what they are saying. Or people that are deaf and that don't know sign language can be taught by other people or go to sign language classes, so they can talk to other people who do know sign language. You can also make a book up for parents that have young children or teenagers and that can tell you words or phrases and the sign language for help so you can sign back to them. It is good as well to teach your children from a baby just in case they have a speech or hearing problem.

Yes, I think that doctors can make up something to replace parts for ears for people that are deaf. The doctors can make up a machine which is like an x-ray machine and it looks at your body, partly the brain and then they can see inside and think of a solution to make people that are disabled (deaf), not deaf and help them to be like other normal people.

There should be more clubs made available for deaf people for different ages in different areas. This will help deaf people build relationships and you can talk to each other about the problems you have and you can build your confidence, knowing someone else is going through the same situation as you and others are in.

### **George Greenway, age 16, Exmouth**

In 10 years cochlear implant companies should change the processor and the coil into one device like the magnet but little bit bigger. If the person doesn't want other people to know they are deaf, this should be ideal. I think this is suitable for 16+ because when you are younger it is important that people know that you are deaf and understand as well but when you become 16 and you don't want other people to know your deaf then it is your choice.

**“Please ... work together for the future of deaf children to make our life easier”**

The other reason why a small device would be ideal for sport is because when you leave school and do sport it is very unlikely to be as aggressive as when you were in school. Your small device would be better because it is lighter and also it would be easier than the current one is around your ear. When you are running it can fall off so I think it is better to have a small device for sport.

This new small device could be rechargeable for the whole day. Every night it can be charged and ready for the next morning.

Please could the cochlear implant companies work together for the future of deaf children to make our life easier because then they will have lots of ideas for the new deaf children.

**“For sign language we should have a small-sized machine that can have a voice inside it and then people can sign and what they say can come out in words”**



## About Deafness Research UK

**Deafness Research UK is the country's only charity dedicated to supporting research into the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of all forms of hearing impairment including tinnitus.**

Run entirely on voluntary contributions, the charity aims to: support high quality medical and scientific research which meets the needs of hearing impaired people; raise awareness of the impact of deafness and other related conditions and provide information and advice based upon the most up-to-date and reliable evidence available.

Deafness Research UK has played a key role in a number of major breakthroughs including the development of a new test to detect hearing loss at birth, the discovery of many of the genes responsible for deafness and the use of digital technology in hearing aids and implants.

The charity is based at the UCL Ear Institute in London but makes grants to research centres across the UK. To date, Deafness Research UK has awarded over £9 million in research grants and, since its Information & Advice Service was launched in 2003, it has helped almost one and a quarter million people.

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## About DCAL

**The Deafness Cognition and Language (DCAL) Research Centre is based at University College London and funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC). DCAL brings together leading deaf and hearing researchers in the fields of sign linguistics, psychology, and neuroscience.**

The vast majority of research studies on language and thought are based on languages which are spoken and heard. DCAL provides a unique perspective on language and thought based on deaf people's communication. DCAL places sign languages and deaf people in the centre of the general understanding of how language and communication work within linguistics, psychology and child development.

For more information go to [www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk](http://www.dcal.ucl.ac.uk)

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