Katie Chadd

Research and Outcomes Forum

Katie Chadd discusses some of the initiatives the RCSLT has introduced to support diversity and inclusion in speech and language therapy research
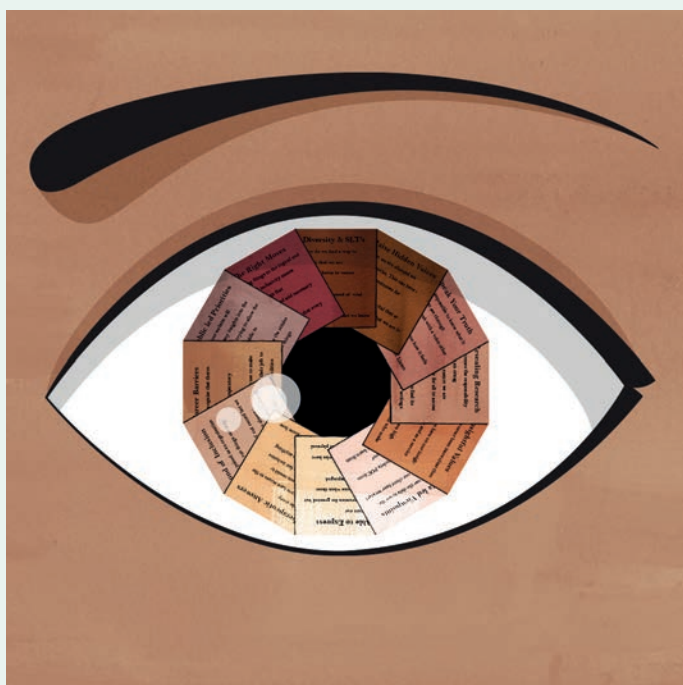
Diversity through the 'research' lens

ILLUSTRATION BY **Jamie Wignall**

We acknowledge there is a paucity of research exploring any of the multiple facets of 'diversity' and speech and language therapy—whether it's evidencing the contemporary composition of our professional workforce, examining direct experiences of SLTs and service users from diverse backgrounds, or robustly trialling practical strategies for ensuring culturally-competent, inclusive and anti-racist practice.

To support members to find the research that does exist, we are have developed new 'evidence and research' pages in the diversity hub on the RCSLT website (**bit.ly/3cAWJSR**), and we are disseminating new publications through our social media and the research newsletter.

To begin exploring priorities for what research needs to be done next, we are holding meetings with researchers who are active in this area, and will be consulting with members going forward about the ways in which the RCSLT could facilitate furthering the evidence-base on these topics.

Diverse and research-active

Supporting the profession to be research-able and -active, is a strategic aim of the RCSLT's research and outcomes team. We know there is room for the speech and language therapy clinical-academic and research workforce to grow, and we already have a number of projects in place to target this.

However, we are also aware that there may be particular groups that face additional barriers to a research career. There is some evidence indicating there is less representation in UK research council funding schemes of applicants who are female, of Black or ethnic minority status, or with a disability (eg *Report on Diversity Results*, UKRI, 2020).

Along with the low representation of the latter two of these groups in our clinical workforce, it is reasonable to assume that our clinical-academic workforce paints a similar picture.

We have now embedded options in our clinical-academic mentoring scheme to request and offer mentorship from and for someone with a similar, diverse background, to facilitate learning from shared experiences and ensure representation. Additionally, a new section in our research newsletter highlights funding calls and opportunities for applicants from diverse backgrounds and for projects that tackle issues of diversity.

Inclusive and informed research

Finally, conducting clinical research that is sensitive to and involves the highly heterogeneous populations that our practice serves is another dimension that the team is aiming to support. This is necessary to ensure that investigations into any aspect of speech and language therapy are valid and reliable, and present findings relevant for our clinical populations.

While speech and language therapy researchers are expertly positioned to facilitate inclusion of those with communication differences, colleagues in other fields such as psychology, sociology or human geography can offer insights into approaches for ensuring inclusive research practices in other domains. For example, learning how to apply methodology that is sensitive to cultural or gender differences, socio-economic or mental health status, age, or the physical and social conditions in which one lives will enrich our investigations. Publications that explore such approaches are also being highlighted in the RCSLT's diversity hub, and we will also share new papers on our social media. We continue our work on supporting patient and public engagement and involvement in research, with a specific focus on increasing accessibility to diverse communities. ∎

References & resources

UKRI (2020). Diversity results for UKRI funding data. Online. Available at: bit.ly/30gM7Ud <Accessed 20 August 2020>

Evidence and research section on the RCSLT diversity hub: bit.ly/3cAWJSR

RCSLT clinical academic mentor network: bit.ly/2S7sRUt

RCLST research newsletters: bit.ly/3ie3DhU