

# The Nuffield Foundation Newsletter

Autumn 2005

## Adolescent mental health a new initiative

**Are adolescent mental health problems on the rise in the UK? If so, is this happening in other countries too, or is this a particular problem in the UK? What might be causing these trends? What are the policy and practice implications?**

As the result of widespread interest in some earlier work it funded in this area, the Nuffield Foundation has decided to fund a specific programme of research on time trends in adolescent mental health. The programme will last for three years, from September 2005 to August 2008, and will consist largely of commissioned funding of a series of critical and analytic research reviews and secondary data analysis.

The work is timely, both in terms of the state of research on the topic, and of the current policy context in the UK. The project will help us to develop a more sophisticated and thoughtful analysis of why various sub-groups of UK adolescents have particularly high levels of mental health problems and related risky health behaviour. We want to know what social changes may have



contributed to an increase in emotional problems in this age group, and we want to compare trends and causes between countries and also within the UK. And we want to see if having a better understanding of possible causes helps to suggest policy or practical interventions to make things better.

An expert Commissioning Group will be responsible for deciding priorities and administering the funds.

The initiative will **not** be seeking speculative proposals, but we will be looking to involve a wide range of people in discussions about the findings, the questions they will raise, and the various implications over the course of the initiative's life. Activities will include a series of seminars, briefing papers and the publication of a source document such as an edited collection of chapters. [www](#)

**Welcome to the Nuffield Foundation Newsletter, which highlights our current areas of grant making and focuses on the outcomes of the projects we fund. The newsletter complements our website, which will be the main source of information on the Foundation and its work.**

[www](#) Further details on all the stories shown here can be found on the website. The Newsletter will be published three times a year and you can obtain further copies or ask to be put on the mailing list by contacting the Foundation. If you have any comments on the Newsletter, please contact us.

[www](#) indicates a live link to further information

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# Legal rights of cohabiters



An increasing number of couples choose to cohabit rather than marry and more than a quarter of children are now born to cohabiting parents. Yet research carried out by Anne Barlow and colleagues shows that over half of all adults wrongly believe there is such a thing as 'common law marriage', conferring many of the same rights as marriage. This affects not only what adults do, but what their children can expect if their parents' relationship ends through separation or death.

Anne Barlow and her co-authors have used findings from studies funded under the

Child Protection and Family Justice programme in their new book *Cohabitation, Marriage and the Law: Social Change and Legal Reform in the 21st Century*. In it they look at the consequences of people's belief in the myth of 'common law' marriage and explore why people cohabit rather than marry, the nature of their commitment to one another and what people think of various legal changes that might offer more protection from financial hardship when cohabiting relationships end. The publication of the book is timely, the Law Commission having recently commenced a project on this issue. [www](#)

## The next Oliver Bird generation

The Oliver Bird Rheumatism Programme, which offers doctoral training in rheumatic disease research in partnership with five UK universities welcomes a second group of students at the start of the new academic year.

Lauren Whyte joins the bone research group at Aberdeen University and two new students at Kings College London join Harry Mavrokordatos who started in April in the Division of Immunology, Infection and Inflammatory diseases. At Glasgow University, Theresa Talhamer, Mairi McGrath and Elinor Anderson join the Centre for Rheumatic Diseases which has also attracted an additional studentship through industrial funding.

Seventeen students, including those from UCL and Newcastle universities, progress to the second year of their training and all the students will gather in Newcastle for the next annual conference in September 2006. [www](#)

## An ear for language

More than 1,600 visitors to the Science Museum recently took part in experiments carried out with funding from a Nuffield Foundation Social Science Small Grant. The study, by Dr Jennifer Aydelott and Dr Frederic Dick of the School of Psychology at Birkbeck College, University of London, explored the relationship between understanding spoken language, and sounds, hearing, motor skills and attention, and how these vary for children and adults.

Experiments focussed on the effect on understanding of the order of words in a sentence, and on the noisiness of the setting in which they were heard. While they have only just begun to analyse this data, early results show how greatly young children's

understanding is impaired in noisy and distracting settings, particularly for uncommon word orders. Not surprisingly, children's ability to understand language in noise improves with age, but does not approach the level of adult listeners until their early teens.

An unexpected benefit of the research was the interest of those who took part. Dr Aydelott and Dr Dick reported that one of the most rewarding parts of their study was talking to children about their experiments. They plan to use the findings from this research in many future projects including a study of hearing and language development for which Dr Dick has received an MRC New Investigator Award. [www](#)



The Elizabeth Nuffield Educational Fund (ENEF) works to improve the employment prospects of women through education. It has become clear from applications to the Fund's grant scheme that there is an acute lack of advice and guidance for women who are caring for disabled children or other disabled family members and who wish to return to study.

*A Guide to Support for Adult Learners Caring for Disabled Children or Other Family Members*, commissioned by ENEF and launched by Lord Rix, aims to help family carers identify suitable courses, find the right childcare or family support and access financial support for their studies and care provision. [www](#)

**Above: Lord Rix at the launch of the Guide (with Philippa Russell, Anne Sofer and Anthony Tomei).**

## Taking students behind the scenes in science



The Nuffield Science Bursary scheme offers first year post-16 science students throughout the UK a chance to work alongside practising scientists in science or technology based projects. Unlike work experience schemes, students carry out a project of their own that will make a contribution to the work of the host organisation. Projects last between 4 to 6 weeks and students complete them during their summer holiday.

Jodie Gregory, 17, of Sir William Perkins's School in Chertsey was one of over 600 students taking part in the

Bursary Scheme this summer. Jodie (pictured left) is keen to be an aeronautical engineer and a placement was found for her with Professor Alan Robinson in the School of Engineering at the University of Surrey. Her project was to investigate lift and drag on an aerofoil and look at different ways of measuring these variables. Her aim was to develop new experiments for next years undergraduates. The placement has confirmed Jodie's ambition and she plans to apply for an aeronautical engineering course at University next year. [www](#)

## FROM THE ARCHIVE

### MEDICINES FOR CHILDREN

Since the 1940s, the Department of Health has advised on the use of licensed adult drugs through the British National Formulary. However many essential medicines were not licensed for use in children, and no equivalent guide existed for paediatric medicines.

In 1999 The British Paediatric Association (now the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health) was able to issue its own advice in the



independent formulary 'Medicines for Children', developed with a Nuffield Foundation grant of £110,000. It proved an essential reference for health professionals. Subsequently Medicines for Children, and the BNF itself, formed the basis for a new formulary, the BNF for Children which was launched in July this year. [www](#)

## Reviewing African healthcare

The Cochrane Collaboration was established in 1993 to ensure that accurate up-to-date information about the effectiveness of healthcare interventions is readily available worldwide. Cochrane Reviews attempt to answer important healthcare questions by identifying and evaluating all relevant research studies and synthesizing their results.

The vast majority of individuals contributing to these reviews are in or from developed countries. A grant from the Commonwealth Programme is supporting the Liverpool School of Tropical Medicine and the South African Cochrane Centre to increase the numbers of people from sub-Saharan Africa participating.

The two organisations will train a cadre of people drawn from across the region, equipping them with the knowledge and skills necessary for initiating, completing and maintaining Cochrane systematic reviews. The programme will focus on undertaking reviews of the effectiveness of strategies for the control of HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria. The training itself will take place in Cape Town; participants then receive support from mentors to actually carry

out the work. Getting key people from African countries to carry out and update Cochrane Reviews engages them in cutting edge science and has the added bonus of creating advocates for promoting change to make healthcare

**"With its focus on co-operation and partnership, this initiative is a good example of work that can be funded under the Nuffield Commonwealth Programme"**

provision more evidence-based. With its focus on co-operation and partnership between two organisations and developing training to bring about improvements in service provision, this initiative is a good example of work that can be funded under the Nuffield Commonwealth Programme. Grants like this are made every two years under the Programme and the next round is about to start. [www](#)





## Languages for all

In 2002 the Nuffield Foundation published a report proposing a scheme of assessment in languages; a 'Languages Ladder'. Similar to graded schemes used in music, swimming, etc, the idea was that language learners of all ages and abilities should be able to assess their progress as and when they were ready, and that gaps between assessment levels should be smaller than in normal public examinations. The concept was developed as part of the DfES' National Languages Strategy and following a successful

tender, the Oxford Cambridge and RSA Exam Board (OCR) has piloted and developed a system that will be available in schools from September.

When fully developed, 'Asset Languages' will have 17 levels ranging from beginners to A level and beyond. There are simple mechanisms for self assessment and formal qualifications can be gained through the OCR. The scheme will become available in 26 languages, including community languages such as Bengali and Somali. [www.ocr.org.uk](http://www.ocr.org.uk)

## WELCOME OUR NEW TRUSTEE



Sir David Watson will be joining the Foundation as a Trustee in October 2005,

in place of Mrs Anne Sofer, who is retiring after fifteen years as a Trustee. Sir David, who was previously Vice Chancellor of the University of Brighton, recently retired from this post to take up a new Chair at the Institute of Education, University of London. [www.ioe.ac.uk](http://www.ioe.ac.uk)

## Maths leadership in Africa

Building stronger capacity in science and technology is a key factor in the development of countries. This in turn is dependent on a good grounding in mathematics. Whilst there has been much emphasis recently on primary education in Africa, relatively little is being done to nurture the African mathematical leadership that can translate into quality teaching and research.

A recent grant from the Foundation is supporting a pilot project to address the training and retention of this leadership. The International Mathematical Union, in partnership with the London Mathematical Society and the African Mathematics Millennium Science Initiative will develop collaborations between UK mathematicians, their colleagues in sub-Saharan Africa and their postgraduate students.

For each collaboration an established researcher in mathematics from the UK visits a university in sub-Saharan Africa to give an intensive postgraduate course and interact with colleagues in the region. [www.imu.ac.uk](http://www.imu.ac.uk)

## Parliamentary reform?



The Hansard Society has a long commitment to the operation of parliamentary democracy. This report documents the results of their recent project, funded by a Nuffield Foundation Open Door grant.

The authors identify and assess changes to parliamentary procedure and practice since 1997 and suggest pragmatic options for further reform. The report, *New Politics, New Parliament? A review of parliamentary modernisation since 1997*, was launched in June at the Palace of Westminster with a discussion panel including the late Rt Hon Robin Cook MP. [www.hansardsociety.org.uk](http://www.hansardsociety.org.uk)

## SALTERS NUFFIELD ADVANCED BIOLOGY

This innovative course has been developed by a project team based at the University of York and the Nuffield Curriculum Centre, together with practising biology teachers. Following a successful pilot, it was launched nationally in September. Students develop their experimental and investigative skills while studying modern biology in a series of engaging contexts. Their studies are enhanced by the integral use of multimedia resources. [www.salters-nuffield.org.uk](http://www.salters-nuffield.org.uk)



William Morris, Lord Nuffield  
1877-1963

The Nuffield Foundation is an endowed charitable trust established in 1943 by William Morris (Lord Nuffield) the founder of Morris Motors, with the aim of advancing social well being. We fund research and practical experiment and the development of capacity to undertake them, working across education, science, social science and social policy. While most of the Foundation's expenditure is on responsive grant programmes we also undertake our own initiatives. More information on our current activities and funded work, or on how to apply for a grant, can be found on the Foundation's website: [www.nuffieldfoundation.org](http://www.nuffieldfoundation.org)

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