

Mind the gap: language development is key for inclusive education and wellbeing

Wednesday 26 and Thursday 27 March 2025

The British Academy, 10-11 Carlton House Terrace, London, SW1Y 5AH

Summary

Language skills are crucial to our lifelong wellbeing and educational attainment. However, around 10% of children face language difficulties, either on their own (Developmental Language Disorder) or in tandem with other diagnoses. Autism, learning disabilities, deafness and hearing loss often hinder language development. Growing up with multiple languages may also lead to differences in language development and education challenges. Importantly, language needs are too often not identified, particularly in older children and adolescents. This is due to insufficient knowledge of language development for children in this age bracket, exacerbated by insufficient communication across disciplines and services. As a result of this lack of support, these needs can lead to limited educational fulfilment, behavioural challenges, school dropouts or exclusions, mental health struggles, unemployment, or even involvement with the justice system.

This conference will celebrate the first anniversary of the launch of the [ATLAS-Leiden Manifesto “Think Language First”](#) at the House of Lords and continue to develop an agenda to increase understanding of language development during late childhood and adolescence across populations. By connecting knowledge across disciplines, it aims to raise awareness amongst policy makers and wider society about the urgent need to improve language assessment and support.

Convenors

ATLAS [team](#)

Professor María J Arche, University of Greenwich
Dr Alexandra Perovic, University College London
Dr Erika Kalocsanyiova, University of Greenwich
Dr Angeliek van Hout, University of Groningen
Professor Josep Quer, ICREA-Pompeu Fabra University
Professor Jeannette Schaeffer, University of Amsterdam
Professor Petra Schulz, Goethe University Frankfurt

Speakers in alphabetical order

Professor Artemis Alexiadou, Humboldt University of Berlin and Leibniz-Centre
General Linguistics
Professor María J. Arche, University of Greenwich
Ms Gemma Arnold, NHS, HMP Belmarsh and Thameside
Ms Gerry Baker, NHS South East London Integrated Care Board
Lord Paul Boateng, House of Lords
Professor Elise de Bree, University of Amsterdam
Dr Sarah Breslin, Council of Europe
Professor Karen Bryan, York St John University
Professor Joao Costa, OECD and European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive
Education
Professor Julie Dockrell, University College of London
Dr Susan Ebbels, Moor House Research & Training Institute, Moor House School &
College and University College of London
Professor Naama Friedman, Tel Aviv University
Dr Angeliek van Hout, University of Groningen
Professor Victoria Joffe, University of Essex
Dr Stacy John-Legere, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust
Dr Erika Kalocsanyiova, University of Greenwich
Mr Derek Munn, The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists
Ms Carol-Ann Murray, NHS South East London Integrated Care Board
Dr Alexandra Perovic, University College London
Professor Josep Quer, ICREA-Pompeu Fabra University
Ms Louisa Righelato, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust
Professor Jeannette Schaeffer, University of Amsterdam
Ms Amy Sherman, NHS, HMP Belmarsh and Thameside
Professor Petra Schulz, Goethe University Frankfurt
Dr Sarah Spencer, University of Sheffield
Dr Lisa Stephenson, University of Leeds Beckett, Ambassador for the OECD Learning
Compass
Ms Scarlett Tozer-Milne, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust
Professor Laurice Tuller, University of Tours
Professor Bencie Woll FBA, University College London

Day 1 – Wednesday 26th March 2025

9:00-9:30	Registration and refreshments (Wohl Gallery)
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9:30-10:00	<p><u>ATLAS Manifesto Think Language First:</u> Our vision and ambition for language needs</p> <p>ATLAS team</p> <p>Professor María J Arche, University of Greenwich Dr Alexandra Perovic, University College London Dr Erika Kalocsanyiova, University of Greenwich Dr Angeliek van Hout, University of Groningen Professor Josep Quer, ICREA-Pompeu Fabra University Professor Jeannette Schaeffer, University of Amsterdam Professor Petra Schulz, Goethe University Frankfurt</p>
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10:00-12:45 - Session 1 - Language is health Chair: Jeannette Schaeffer This session will discuss the role of health services in the web of sectors that need to be involved in the identification of language needs, featuring case studies.	
10:00-10:45	Professor Karen Bryan OBE, York St John University <i>Incidence of Speech, Language and Communication Difficulties in young offenders: opportunities to identify difficulties earlier</i>
10:45-11:15	Coffee break (Wohl Gallery)
11:15-11:45	Dr Stacy John-Legere, Louisa Righelato and Scarlett Tozer-Milne, Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust <i>Bridging the Gap</i>
11:45-12:15	Ms Gemma Arnold and Amy Sherman, NHS, HMP Belmarsh and Thameside <i>'Early' Identification in the adult prison estate: Too little too late?</i>
12:15-12:45	Ms Carol-Ann Murray and Gerry Baker, NHS South East London Integrated Care Board <i>A Reality Check for Early Intervention: What happens when speech, language, and communication needs are unmet in childhood?</i>

12: 45-13:45	Lunch (Wohl Gallery)
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13:45-17:00 - Session 2 - Language as the gateway to education fulfilment.

Chair: Angeliek van Hout

This session will discuss the relation between language development, social inequalities and literacy and educational fulfilment across the school years.

13:45-14:30	Dr Sarah Spencer, University of Sheffield <i>Secondary School as a place to thrive as a young person with language needs</i>
14:30-15:15	Professor Vicky Joffe, University of Essex <i>The Power and Impact of Language and Communication in Adolescence and Adulthood</i>
15:15-15:30	Coffee break (Wohl Gallery)
15:30-16:15	Professor Julie Dockrell, University College London-Institute of Education <i>Embedding oracy within education: challenges and opportunities</i>
16:15-17:00	Professor Elise de Bree, University of Amsterdam <i>Language disorders and literacy: Relations and issues</i>

17:00-17:15	ATLAS group, Main points of the day
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17:15	RECEPTION
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Day 2 – Thursday 27th March 2025

9:30-13:00 - Panel 3 - Seeking to improve the identification of language needs.

Chair: Petra Shulz

Linguistic knowledge for better identification, assessment and intervention. This panel will discuss the necessary liaison across disciplines and sectors to improve assessment highlighting the role of linguistics.

9:30-10:15	Professor Artemis Alexiadou, Humboldt University of Berlin and Leibniz-Centre General Linguistics <i>Which mechanisms shape heritage grammars?</i>
10:15-11:00	Professor Laurie Tuller, University of Tours <i>Effective Language Assessment: Insights from Linguistic Theory and Language in Autism</i>
11:00-11:30	Coffee break (Wohl Gallery)

11:30-12:15	Dr Susan Ebbels, Moor House Research & Training Institute, Moor House School & College <i>Grammatical language difficulties in children with (developmental) language disorder: target identification and intervention</i>
12:15-13:00	Professor Naama Friedman, Tel Aviv University <i>Syntactic theory is a useful tool for diagnosis, intervention, and prevention of language disorders</i>

13:00-14:00	Lunch (Wohl Gallery)
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14:00-15:30 - Panel 4 - What needs to change?

Chair: Josep Quer

This panel will focus on the policies that need to change internationally to ensure timely identification of language needs, instrumental to improve full inclusion of children and young people.

14:00-14:45	Professor Bencie Woll FBA, University College London <i>Deprivation, Delay, Disorder: issues in deaf children's early language and communication experiences</i>
14:45-15:15	Professor Joao Costa (OECD, European Agency for Special Needs and Inclusive Education) <i>Language Matters for Full Inclusion</i>
15:15-15:30	Coffee break

15:30-16:45 - Discussion table - How to bring the change: policy and international cooperation

Chair: Lord Boateng

Discussion chaired by Lord Boateng: Identifying priorities going forward in the UK and internationally.

15:30-15:45	Mr Derek Munn, Royal College Speech and Language Therapists, Director of Policy and Public Affairs <i>From evidence to change: applying what we know about child language to influence policy and outcomes</i>
15:45-16:00	Dr Sarah Breslin, Council of Europe <i>The added value of transnational cooperation in language education</i>

16:00-16:15	Dr Lisa Stephenson, University of Leeds Beckett, Ambassador for the OECD Learning Compass Title TBC
16:45-17:00	Closing words ATLAS team.