Wales Autism Research Centre

Annual Report

2011-2012
2011-2012 has been an exciting year for the Wales Autism Research Centre (WARC). During this second official year, the research reputation of the Centre has been growing, with many new international scientific publications appearing. During the year we hosted several major international seminars including a lecture by Prof. Sir Michael Rutter and an academic tour by Prof. Sally Rogers from the MIND Institute, USA, who gave workshops on evidence-based early intervention in both North and South Wales. WARC also contributed to Autism Cymru’s highly successful International Conference in Cardiff.

During this year we were awarded a grant from the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) that targets our mission to engage with families and the non-academic community. The project brings new opportunities to promote the sharing of scientific knowledge and has already created many activities that are successfully bringing the university laboratory closer to the lives of families.

We held our first clinical training courses this year, with training in the Autism Diagnostic Observation Scale (ADOS). The training was led by ADOS author, Prof. Ann Le Couteur, Newcastle University and included trainers from Finland, and trainees from Wales and Hong Kong. Training on the Diagnostic Interview for Social and Communication Disorders (DISCO) has also been facilitated this year through my role with the Welsh Government’s ASD Adult Clinical Network and the WARC team have prepared new evidence-based adaptations of this diagnostic tool.

This has also been an important year for our Welsh Government activities. Our report on children’s diagnostic services has been published on our online Awares Talk website. Another project, the pilot national NHS database for ASD led by collaborator Dr Dawn Wimpory has demonstrated feasibility of a database for NHS clinicians. This year, WARC PhD student Rachel Kent also spent a 3 month internship at the Welsh Government as part of her ESRC studentship. We hope that this will be the first of future knowledge exchange visits.

We are delighted to watch the direction of the Wales Autism Research Centre gaining strength as scientific research and knowledge exchange activities go hand in hand to fulfil our ambition to advance scientific understanding to create positive change.

Susan Leekam, PhD
Chair in Autism
Director of the Wales Autism Research Centre
Wales Autism Research Centre (WARC) was officially launched in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University in Sept 2010. WARC is the UK’s first national research centre for autism, initiated through the unique collaboration of two charities, Autism Cymru and Autistica, working together with the School of Psychology, Cardiff University and the Welsh Government. This collaborative venture was supported by generous donations from six charities, Autism Initiatives, Waterloo Foundation, Baily Thomas Charitable Fund, Freemasons Grand Charity, Jane Hodge Foundation and Research Autism. The funding created two new appointments, Chair in Autism, (Prof. Susan Leekam) and postdoctoral researcher (Dr Sarah Carrington). In addition further funds were also gratefully received in 2011 from the Gwendoline and Margaret Davies Charity and the William and Christine Eynon Charity.

Mission

“Advancing scientific understanding of autism to create positive change”

We are achieving this mission in two ways. First by facilitating new scientific research of international standing and second by integrating scientific evidence with policy and practice.

A set of four objectives guide us in this mission. These objectives are;

1. to conduct internationally competitive scientific research projects
2. to facilitate interdisciplinary research and research networks
3. to develop research and training that supports and influences practice and policy
4. to improve public and professional awareness of research
Wales Autism Research Centre Membership 2011-2012

Members of the Centre (foundation funding)

Director: Professor Sue Leekam

Postdoctoral Research Associate: Sarah Carrington

Research Staff employed during April 2011 and March 2012 (external grant funding)

Dr Louise White, Research Associate, Waterloo Foundation & Project Manager, ESRC

Dr Jane Lidstone, Research Associate, Baily Thomas Charitable Fund

Beverley Winn, Parent Consultant & Research Assistant (ESRC)

PhD Students

Rachel Kent, funded by ESRC CASE Award (Oct 2009 – Sep 2013)

Mirko Ulijarević, funded by WORD studentship (Jan 10- Dec 2012)

Rhiannon Fyfield, second supervisor Prof. Leekam (Oct 10 – Sep 2014)

Alice Winstanley, second supervisor Prof. Leekam (Oct 08 – Sep 2012)

Associate members

Dr David McGonigle, Research Council UK Fellow in Imaging the Body and Brain, Cardiff University

Dr Dawn Wimpory, Lecturer/practitioner, Bangor University & consultant clinical psychiatrist, Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board

Dr Miriam Cooper, Clinical lecturer and PhD student (Wales Clinical Academic Track)

Dr Linda Iao, Postdoctoral Research Fellow, University of Hong Kong
Wales Autism Research Centre: April 2011- March 2012

**Associate members Assistants and volunteers**
- Donna Harris, UROP student and assistant – 25th July-17th Sept, 2011
- Lynda Morgan, parent representative and assistant – 1st November, 2011-present
- Katharine Bowen, research assistant - Sep 2011 to April 2012
- Katherine Ellis-Davies, research assistant Sep 2011 to April 2012
- Laura Fasoli, research assistant - Oct 2011 to May 2012
- Hoda El Gaby, volunteer research assistant - Jan 2012 to present

**Advisory Committee**
- Dylan Jones (Head of School of Psychology, Cardiff University)
- Hugh Morgan (Chief Executive Officer, Autism Cymru)
- Simon Wallace (Director of Research, Autistica)
- David Clayton, Adult Social Services Policy, Welsh Assembly Government
- Sue Leekam (Chair of Autism Research, Cardiff University)
- External Advisor: Prof. Margot Prior, University of Melbourne, Senior international scientist and Chair of Advisory Board for Olga Tennison Research Centre, Australia
Wales Autism Research Centre Annual Report 2011-2012

The Wales Autism Research Centre’s five year plan was produced in April 2010. This identified four key objectives and a set of planned activities guiding the work of the Wales Autism Research Centre towards its mission. The Annual Report 2011-2012 outlines the achievements of the Centre against these objectives. For each section of the report below, we show the activities as planned in our five year plan and the actual results this year in terms of activities completed from April 2011 to March 2012.

Objective 1: Conducting internationally competitive scientific research projects
The Centre’s mission relies on the production of innovative, high quality research grant awards, publications in top-quality scientific journals and dissemination of results at international conferences and national meetings. Priority areas for research projects include (a) Identification (b) Diagnosis (c) Developmental processes and (d) Intervention. Details of these projects can be found on our website http://www.walesautismresearchcentre.com/

Planned activities
- New grants applied for and success in funding applications
- Publication in high quality scientific journals
- International conference presentations and invited talks
- Databases and measures developed

Several new grants have started over the past year, and our 2011-2012 research findings have been published in 13 peer reviewed academic publications in print and in press. Members of the team have presented their work at both national and international conferences this year, including the International Meeting for Autism Research, San Diego.

What role does atypical sensory processing play in the core features of ASD?

Rachel Kent
S. Leekam, J. Gould, L. Wing & A. LeCouteur
International Meeting for Autism Research, San Diego, May 2011

False Belief and Interventions: Can the Brain Tell the Difference?

Background

Method

Summary

Background

Method

Summary

Report
Grants

**New grants awarded April 2011 – March 2012**
- Autism Speaks Trailblazers Award. Tuning anxiety out: Exploring the potential of noise cancellation in Autism Spectrum Disorder sound sensitivity (March 2012). PI: Dr Mark Atherton, Brunel University; Co-investigators and collaborators: Prof. Leekam, Dr McGonigle, Sue Osborn (Kingwood Trust). £100,000.
- Cardiff University Neuroscience and Mental Health Research Institute seed corn funding. White matter alterations in 22q11.2 Deletion Syndrome: a pilot study (March 2012). PI: Dr Carrington; Co-Investigators: Dr van den Bree, Prof. Leekam, Prof. Jones, Prof. Owen. £4,964.75.
- Personal donation to the centre of funds raised by Mrs A. Jones at a Cream Tea afternoon at the Aberporth Flower Arrangement Club. £300.

**New grants starting April 2011 – March 2012**

**Ongoing external grants and PhD funding**
- Cardiff University and Waterloo Foundation (matched funding). Research Networking Event award. PI Prof. Leekam, Co-app Dr Kourkoulou, £2,795. April 2010-September 2012.

**Grants completed:**
- ESRC. CASE Award Using the Diagnostic Interview for Social and Communication Disorders (DISCO) for research. PI; Prof. Leekam in partnership with NAS. £64,000. Start date: Oct 09 (4 yrs). (PhD student Rachel Kent)
- Welsh Assembly Government and Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board (BCUHB). Development of an Autism Spectrum Disorder database within Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board. PI Dr D. Wimpory, Bangor University Co-app. Prof. S. Leekam (Dec 2010-May 2012)

**Grants applied for (decision awaited).**
- ESRC Knowledge Exchange Grant. Developing a Research-Policy-Practice Hub for Autism Spectrum Disorders. £200,000 including matched funding from WG. [PI: Prof. Leekam, Col: Dr Dawn Wimpory, School of Psychology, Bangor University and Betsi-Cadwaladr University Health Board].
Proposals in preparation

- A large multi-centre application to the MRC is being developed. This work is a collaboration between Dr Carrington and Prof. Leekam and members of the Department of Psychological Medicine and Neurology, the MRC Centre for Neuropsychiatric Genetics & Genomics, Cardiff University Brain Research Imaging Centre, and collaborators in Dublin and London. The study will focus on the psychological, neurobiological, and genetic profiles of 22q11.2 deletion syndrome (velocardiofacial syndrome) and associated conditions, including autism and psychosis. A grant proposal will be submitted to the MRC in September 2012. Cardiff University co-applicants: Prof. Michael Owen, Dr. Marianne Van Den Bree, Dr Sarah Carrington, Prof. Sue Leekam, Prof. Derek Jones.


Research on Sensory Sensitivity
Research on sensory sensitivity is a major focus of our current grant-funded work. We have five current studies ongoing in this area. For example, more than 60 families have taken part in two linked studies supported by the Baily Thomas Charitable Fund and the Welsh Government. This research, carried out by Dr Jane Lidstone and Mirko Uljarević MD is identifying previously unexplored links between sensory sensitivity, restricted and repetitive behaviour and anxiety in children. The work also looks into stress and coping strategies among parents of children with autism. Local clinicians Dr Ruth Paradise, Hilary Kanaris, Julie Mullis and Anne Marie McKigney and researchers from Newcastle, Australia and USA are consulting on this project. More than 20 adults with AS have taken part in two other research studies on sensory processing, Dr. David McGonigle, Prof Sue Leekam, Dr Louise White, Rachel Kent and Dr Carrington have been investigating how people process and adapt to the stimuli that reach their senses focusing on tactile stimuli in particular. These projects have been supported by the Waterloo Foundation and the Economic and Social Research Council. Finally, in a newly awarded Autism Speaks Trailblazer study will be working with principal researcher, Dr Mark Atherton, Engineering Design, Brunel University and Sue Osborn at the Kingwood Trust, to explore the potential of adaptive sound filtering and noise cancellation technology to selectively ‘tune out’ the sounds that people with autism find challenging. We will be reporting the results of these projects in next year’s annual report!
Publications

Publications in scientific journals from March 2011- April 2012 are shown below.

New publications in print:


New publications online:


New publications in press:


New publications submitted and under journal peer review:


- McGonigle D.J. How I learned to stop worrying and love the variability. Submitted to Neuroimage (invited review for ‘20 years of fMRI – Special Issue’).


International conference presentations and international invited talks:


Prof. Leekam chaired the second day of the Autism Cymru international conference, Cardiff, 22nd June, 2011.

National conference presentations and invited external academic presentations:


Newcastle, UK. 7th September 2011.


**Internal academic talks and presentations by WARC staff, students, and Cardiff Associate members**


- Getting to know you’ event for School of Psychology non-academic staff to introduce the work of the Wales Autism Research Centre. Presentations by Professor Leekam, Dr Carrington, Dr Lidstone, Dr White, Dr McGonigle, Mrs Winn, Dr Uljarević, and Ms Kent, 1st November, 2011.


- Kent, R (2011). What role does atypical sensory processing play in the core features of Autism? Speaking of Science Conference, Cardiff University, 5th May, 2011. (Won People’s Award for Best Talk).

Databases and measures developed

- As part of the ESRC funded project ‘Integrating Research and Practice in Autism Spectrum Disorders’ Dr Louise White has been working with Autism Cymru and Nemysis (a software development company) to create an online forum to facilitate communication and collaboration between researchers and professionals working in autism (http://awares.org/talk/).

- Development of an Autism Spectrum Disorder database within Betsi Cadwaladr University Health Board. Dr Dawn Wimpory, Bangor University (Co-I: Prof. Leekam WARC). Database to develop the use of NHS data (Phase 1 development complete and report submitted).

- The Wales Autism Research Centre Recruitment Register. Dr Sarah Carrington, Wales Autism Research Centre. Register for recruitment of potential research participants (Phase 2 development complete).

- Dr Sarah Carrington and Rachel Kent are working with Dr Judith Gould at the National Autistic Society to test adapted forms of the Diagnostic Interview for Social and Communication Disorders (DISCO).

The work of our Parent Consultant

- Beverley Winn has continued to work with the Wales Autism Research Centre, both in her Parent Consultant role, and more recently as a research assistant on two different projects. Beverley plans to continue to develop the research side of her role. She has been successful in her application for a funded PhD studentship from Cardiff University’s School of Psychology. She will start her research, which focuses on families with ASD, in January 2013. She will be co-supervised by Dr Katherine Shelton and Prof. Sue Leekam.

Beverley Winn (right), Parent Consultant for WARC

Wales Autism Research Centre Lab Group meetings

These fortnightly meetings of all team members enable research associates, postgraduate students and undergraduates working with the team to discuss their most recent findings and on-going work. Over the past year, membership of the lab group has expanded with new members joining us from other research groups. The multi-disciplinary nature of the team, therefore, ensures that individual projects are grounded within a broad research context. In addition, new publications – both academic and non-academic – within the field of autism are discussed.
Objective 2: Facilitating interdisciplinary research and research networks

A key priority of the Wales Autism Research Centre is to promote communication and a strong collaborative research ethos. Autism spectrum disorders are complex, developing conditions and the advancement of knowledge in autism research relies on cooperation and sharing of knowledge across networks of expertise and across disciplines.

Planned activities

● The development of Cardiff Autism Research Group seminars and visits to the Centre by international research visitors

● Joint activities and meetings with The Neuroscience and Mental Health Research Institute

● Contributing to the development of collaborative research networks in Wales, UK and internationally

● Contribution to planning for international conference (2011) organised by Autism Cymru

Collaborations have been strengthened with the Cardiff University Brain Imaging Centre, the Neuroscience and Mental Health Research Institute, and the Developmental Psychology Research Group led by Prof. Dale Hay and Prof. Merideth Gattis.

We have hosted a range of international visitors and speakers, including Prof. Sir Michael Rutter, Prof. Sally Rogers, Prof. Jonathan Green and the PACT team, and Dr Liz Pellicano. We have continued to strengthen ties with La Trobe University, Australia with a visit from Dr Kristelle Hudry, who gave a talk and spent time meeting with members of the team.

Left: Dr Kristelle Hudry (LaTrobe University) with members of the Development at Cardiff group, July 2011; Right: From right to left – Prof. Leekam, Dr Dawn Wimpory, Dr Catherine Aldred, Prof. Sally Rogers, Prof. Jonathan Green, and Dr Vicky Slonims at the one-day conference on early intervention for young children with ASD in Bangor, June 2011; Bottom: Members of the Wales Autism Research Centre and the Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre (Melbourne, Australia) catch up at the International Meeting for Autism Research, May 2011.
Seminars and events by national and international researchers

Workshops
- Early Intervention for young children with ASD. One-day Conference held at Bangor University organized by Professor S Leekam, Dr D. Wimpory and Dr S. Carrington. Speakers: Dr Dawn Wimpory, Dr Catherine Aldred, Prof. Sally Rogers, and Prof. Jonathan Green. Chaired by Prof. Leekam, attended by Dr Carrington, Dr Lidstone and Dr Uljarević – 20th June, 2011.

Invited seminars
- “Look at that!” Autistic playfulness, creativity and imagination. Dr Wendy Keay-Bright, Cardiff School of Art and Design, 28th March 2012 (organiser Dr Mirko Ujlarević and Mrs. Winn).
- Atypical motor development: Evidence from neurodevelopmental disorders and at risk siblings. Invited seminar by Dr Elizabeth Hill, Reader, Goldsmiths, University of London, 3rd Feb, 2012. (Organiser Dr Lidstone, and co-hosted by the Development@Cardiff group)
- Resilience. Invited talk by Prof. Sir Michael Rutter, Professor of Developmental Psychopathology at the Institute of Psychiatry, King’s College, London, 24th Nov, 2011. Part of the School of Psychology International Seminar series and co-hosted by the Centre. Attended by staff, students, and members of CARG.
- The development of atypical social-communication in autism. Dr Kristelle Hudry OTARC, La Trobe University – 6th- 8th July, 2011. (Organiser Dr Lidstone).
- The amygdala’s role in emotion perception: Attentional orienting to features within a face? Dr Tony Atkinson, Senior Lecturer, Durham University, 6th June, 2011.
- Children with autism learn to search differently in a large-scale context. Dr Liz Pellicano, Senior Lecturer, Institute of Education, University of London, 26th May, 2011. (Organiser Dr Lidstone).

Other academic visitors to CARG
- Dr Maria Nunez, Glasgow Caledonian University – 12th December, 2011

Joint activities with Postgraduate Cardiff Neuroscience Society
- Neuroscience Café - Understanding Autism: The Science and Experience of Sensory Symptoms. 7th June, 2011. Speakers: Miss Kent, Dr McGonigle, Dr McCreddie. Organisers: Dr Carrington, Mrs. Robson.

Collaborations with the Neuroscience and Mental Health Research Institute, Cardiff University
- On-going imaging pilot work and data analysis for a joint grant application for a large-scale collaborative study with members of the Neuroscience and Mental Health Research Institute.

New collaborations and networks
- Dr Anneli Kylliainen was awarded funding from the Finnish Academy to travel to the UK to teach on the Wales Autism Research Centre’s first ADOS course in August 2011. Dr Kylliainen will continue to collaborate with researchers in WARC and CUBRIC to develop eye gaze processing research.

Dr Linda Iao was the first Cardiff PhD graduate from the Wales Autism Research Centre. She is pictured here on her graduation day with Prof. Leekam
● Our new on-line forum is also providing an opportunity to further develop existing collaborations and promote the development of new, multi-disciplinary networks

● International collaboration between Cardiff University, University of Hong Kong, Research on social interest and play in autism spectrum disorder. With Prof. Terry Au, Dr Carol To (University of Hong Kong), Dr Linda Iao (pictured: formerly of the Wales Autism Research Centre and now a postdoctoral Research Fellow with the University of Hong Kong) and Prof. Dale Hay and Prof. Merideth Gattis (Cardiff University). Funded by the National Institute of Social Care

Ongoing collaborative networks
● Prof. Leekam is member of Scientific Board of British Autism Siblings Study UK Network and the management board of the Learning Disability and Autism Research Network (LDAN)

● Dr Carrington is a member of the MRC Autism Imaging Multi-centre Study (A.I.M.S) consortium

● Collaboration with Dr Maria Nunez (Glasgow Caledonian University) on a project investigating joint attention in deaf-blind children. Funded by SENSE Scotland.

● Collaboration with Dr Mark Atherton (Brunel University), Sue Osborn (Kingwood Trust) and Hilary Gilfoy exploring noise cancellation and sound sensitivity. Funded by an Autism Speaks Trailblazers Award.

Collaborators on grants and funding sources
● Dr Dawn Wimpory, Bangor University, (Welsh Assembly Government)

● Dr David McGonigle, Cardiff University (Waterloo Foundation)

● Prof. Margot Prior, University of Melbourne (Baily Thomas Charitable Fund)

● Prof. David Evans, (Baily Thomas Charitable Fund)

● Prof. Helen McConachie, Prof Mark Freeston, Prof. Ann Le Couteur, Dr. Jacqui Rodgers, Newcastle University (RfPB, NIHR funding)

● Maggie Bowen and Lynn Plimley, Autism Cymru (Waterloo Foundation)

● Dr. Judith Gould and Dr. Lorna Wing, National Autistic Society and Prof. Ann Le Couteur, Newcastle University (ESRC)

● Mrs Hilary Kanaris, Aneurin Bevan NHS (Baily Thomas Charitable Fund)

● Mrs Anne Marie McKigney, Aneurin Bevan NHS (Baily Thomas Charitable Fund)

● Mrs Julie Mullis, Cardiff and Vale NHS (Baily Thomas Charitable Fund)

● Dr Ruth Paradice, Cardiff and Vale NHS (Baily Thomas Charitable Fund)
Objective 3: Developing research and training that supports and influences practice and policy

One of the objectives of The Wales Autism Research Centre is to develop research and training to specifically support and influence practice and government policy. We have a unique opportunity to do this, making the Wales Autism Research Centre distinctive in its goals amongst research centres for autism.

Planned activities

● Evidence, reports and advisory support to Welsh Assembly Government

● Meetings and university exchanges with Welsh Assembly Members, government staff and practitioners

● Training: materials for use by non-academics (e.g. in education services) and student training in practice and policy

● Improved measurable outcome/impact of research on policy and practice.

Our work under this objective has been advanced by four main activities; an ESRC Knowledge Exchange Grant, clinical training in the administration of the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule, a PhD internship with the Welsh Government, and work coordinating the development of clinical tools for adult diagnosis within Wales.

Rachel Kent completed a three-month ESRC PhD internship with the Welsh Government from Oct- Dec 2011. Rachel was able to observe and contribute to the latest developments in the ASD Strategic Action Plan and the impact of research on policy.

Left: Dr Louise White speaking at a National Autistic Society event held in the School of Psychology, September 2011; Right: Dr. Jin Higashijima (Research Fellow, Japan Society for Promotion of Science) during her visit to the centre in January 2012.
Meetings and exchanges with Welsh Assembly Members, government staff and practitioners

Welsh Assembly Government: meetings

- Prof. Leekam Scottish Steering Group meeting, Edinburgh – 21st and 22nd February, 2012
- Prof. Leekam meeting with Hugh Morgan (CEO of Autism Cymru) and Jonathan Morgan (WAG) to discuss policy-related funding – 21st July, 2011.
- Prof. Leekam: Member of ASD Strategy Stakeholder Group, Welsh Assembly Government Strategic Action Plan for Autism, Wales (quarterly meetings)

- Prof. Leekam: Member of the Adults Diagnosis Steering Group. This is the steering group leading the arrangements for the NHS Adult Diagnosis Clinical Network across Wales.

Meetings with other government members

- Prof. Leekam met with Dr. Jin Higashijima from the Japan Society for Promotion of Science when she visited the centre in January 2012 to learn about our work linking science to the community

Meetings with third sector, practitioner, and educational organisations Charities and other organisations:

- Prof. Leekam meeting with Hugh Morgan – 19th January, 2012
- Prof. Leekam telephone meeting with NAS policy advisor Anthony Houlden – 16th January, 2012
- Prof. Leekam meeting with Autism Cymru – 21st November, 2011
- ESRC Deputy Head of Communications visit – attended by Dr Carrington and Dr White, 25th July, 2011
- Prof. Leekam, Dr McGonigle, Dr White and Dr Carrington meeting with Sue Osborn (Kingwood Trust) – 13th April, 2011

Practitioners:

- Prof. Leekam, Dr Carrington and Rachel Kent meeting with Dr Judith Gould to present and discuss results on adaptation of the Diagnostic Instrument for Social and Communication Disorders algorithms – 13th April, 2012.
- Baily Thomas and WORD project – Prof. Leekam, Dr Lidstone, Dr Uljarević, Bi-monthly meetings with clinicians Mrs Kanaris, Mrs McKigney, Mrs Julie Mullis, Dr Ruth Paradice.
- ESRC project Focus Group – 12th September, 2011, Dr White, Prof. Leekam, Dr Ramsden, Mr Feinstein

Integrating Research and Practice in Autism Spectrum Disorder

This ESRC Knowledge Exchange Grant awarded to Prof. Leekam and Dr Carrington in June 2011, is led by Project Manager Dr White. The project aims to make research methodologies and findings more accessible to clinicians, charities and families. An online forum has been set up in collaboration with the charity Autism Cymru http://awares.org/talk/ The forum provides an opportunity for international collaboration and discussion between clinicians and researchers from different disciplines. To date, subscribers have been discussing topics such as diagnosis and sensory symptoms in ASD.

A ‘Research Toolkit’ is also being developed by Dr White in partnership with the NAS and Waterloo Foundation. The aim is to provide users of interventions – such as those who work for charities or funders – with a better understanding of the research evidence for interventions. It will explain how research projects work, the sorts of information that researchers are looking for and why. In addition, a family-friendly “Research aware” booklet about interventions in ASD has been prepared by Dr White and Dr Uljarević.
● Prof. Leekam meeting with Prof. Helen McConachie, Newcastle University, discussing plans for future CBT multi-site application - 12th July, 2011.

● Prof. Leekam visited St Cadoc’s Hospital to meet with Hilary Kanaris’ team – 14th June, 2011.

● Prof. Leekam meeting with Dr. Bridget Craddock, Welsh Adult Neurodevelopment Disorder Clinic – 31st May, 2011.

Events attended
● Dyscovery Centre Open Day – attended by Prof. Leekam – 2nd February, 2012

● Cross Party Autism Group Meeting, attended by Mrs Winn – 6th December, 2011

● Prof. Leekam and Mrs Winn attended Ashgrove Partnership Lunch – 28th June, 2011.

● Retirement reception for Mrs. Hilary Gilfoy, Chief Executive of Autistica – 24th May, 2011

● Autistica Lunch Event, attended by Dr Carrington and Dr McGonigle – 10th May, 2011

● Holly’s Ball, attended by Mrs Winn – 2nd April, 2011

Training
● Meetings and talk by Prof. Leekam about the DISCO. Attended by WARC team and Dr Judith Gould and Dr Helen Matthews- 1st August, 2011

● Prof. Sally Rogers workshop and presentation at Autism Cymru conference - ESRC funding awarded to Prof. Leekam and Dr. Carrington contributed to the funding for a workshop to be delivered by Prof. Rogers during the conference – 21st & 22nd June, 2011

Training course for administration of the Autism Diagnostic Observation Schedule
2nd - 5th August, 2011 – organisers Dr Carrington, Ms. Donna Harris (administrative assistant), Ms. Sarah Barrett (student volunteer)
Trainers: Prof. Ann le Couteur (Newcastle University), Dr Anneli Kylläinen (University of Tampere, Finland); Trainee Trainers: Dr Sarah Carrington (Wales Autism Research Centre), Ms. Outi Reinwall (University of Helsinki, Finland)
Course attendees: eight researchers and clinicians from were trained on this course, including one trainee from Hong Kong.
Student training experience
Members of the Wales Autism Research Centre, Dr White and Dr Carrington supervised three final year undergraduate projects in the School of Psychology.

- Does the understanding of false beliefs reflect a domain-specific or domain-general capacity? – Clare Northover (supervisors: Dr Carrington & Prof. Leekam)

- The effects of information on adult’s explicit and implicit attitudes towards adults with autism spectrum disorder – Holly Martin (supervisors: Dr White & Prof Leekam)

- Altering attitudes toward people with autism – Morgan Griffiths (supervisors: Dr White & Prof Leekam)

- Improved measurable outcome/impact of research on policy and practice
- 120 researchers and practitioners have joined the on-line forum developed as part of our ESRC Knowledge Exchange Grant
- 122 clinicians registered for a talk presented by Prof. Leekam about the Diagnostic Instrument for Social and Communication Disorders
- 18 parent group leaders, representing parent organisations across Wales have attended our Researcher on the Road events.

The Wales Autism Research Centre Lion (Dr Jane Lidstone) at the Ashgrove School Fun Day; See p9 for description of Jane’s research
Objective 4: Improving public and professional awareness of research.

A priority for the Wales Autism Research Centre is to increase awareness of autism and make the work of WARC visible and accessible to the public. Most important however is to improve public understanding of scientific research in autism by promoting ‘research awareness’ and to share our research findings and methods with others.

Planned activities

- Develop materials to promote the centre and our research to the public, professional groups and media
- Use the latest bibliographic linking tools and search engine facilities to maximise impact of publications
- Provide events targeting public and professional awareness of autism research and monitor outcomes

- Develop a communications strategy in collaboration with other agencies; e.g. AWARES, Autism Cymru

Our ESRC Knowledge Exchange Grant focused on improving public and professional awareness of research in a series of ‘Researchers on the Road’ trips which has seen members of the team travel throughout Wales to meet with the leaders of parent support groups.

The team have given a number of talks to interest groups in the autism community, including NAS Parent Group and ASD social groups. Furthermore, we have continued to invite visitors to the Wales Autism Research Centre; an Open Door week in June provided parents with the opportunity to drop into the Centre with their children and visit us. The Autism Cymru international conference (21-22nd June 2011) was another important opportunity to strengthen our links with parents and professionals.

We continue to use our Facebook page to facilitate public awareness of our latest activities, with 337 people subscribing to our page, and share information with a number of other local autism organisations which are available on facebook.
Materials and procedures developed to promote the Wales Autism Research Centre to the public, professional groups and media.

- Our website can be found at http://www.walesautismresearchcentre.com/. In addition to information about our research, the website includes a page for parents and for volunteers, as well as updates on news and events.

- Up to date postings and photos are given weekly on our Facebook page

- (http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Wales-Autism-Research-Centre-WARC/103033943068748) which can be accessed by non-facebook members. Our Facebook page now has 337 fans.

- Online forum for researchers and professionals http://awares.org/talk/

- Promotional leaflets have been developed providing a general introduction to the Wales Autism Research Centre (pictured).

- ‘The Wales Autism Research Centre and Brain Imaging’. A family-friendly booklet developed by Dr Carrington as part of our ESRC Knowledge Exchange Grant. The booklet describes what to expect if you visit the brain imaging centre to help out with a study.

- A familiarisation process has been established to gradually introduce volunteers to the brain imaging environment. In addition to the booklet described above, volunteers are encouraged to visit the mock scanner at CUBRIC before deciding whether they would like to take part. This process has helped children to take part in imaging work with Dr Carrington.

Use the latest bibliographic linking tools and search engine facilities to maximise impact of publications

All WARC members’ publications are linked to search tools Researcher ID and Scopus. This ensures that any search for name, topic, keywords, accesses the full title of all scientific publications and their impact (times cited).
Provide events targeting public and professional awareness of autism research and monitor outcomes

Wales Autism Research Centre talks presented to the Welsh Government, schools, colleges, and parent audiences

- Researchers on the Road, Wrexham – 15th March, 2012. Organised by Dr White, Dr Carrington and Mrs Winn, and Mrs Morgan. Hosted by Dr Carrington and Dr White.

- Researchers on the Road, Bangor – 14th March, 2012. Organised by Dr White, Dr Carrington, Mrs Winn, and Mrs Morgan. Hosted by Dr Carrington and Dr White.

- Researchers on the Road, Carmarthen – 31st January, 2012. Organised by Dr White, Dr Carrington and Mrs Winn. Hosted by Dr Carrington and Mrs Winn.

- Researchers on the Road, Cardiff – 13th December, 2011. Organised by Dr White, Dr Carrington and Mrs Winn. Hosted by Dr Carrington and Mrs Winn.

- Presentation to Carmarthenshire Stakeholder Group, Pontyates. ‘Overview of the Wales Autism Research Centre’. Dr Sarah Carrington and Dr Louise White – 4th Nov, 2011

- Cardiff and the Vale NAS Parent Group Conference, hosted by the Wales Autism Research Centre. Introductions given by Prof. Leekam, Dr White, and Dr Carrington – 21st September, 2011.

- Dr Carrington and Dr White informal presentation about the Wales Autism Research Centre for the Asperger social group in Pontypridd – 16th June, 2011.

- Ashgrove School Fun Day attended by Dr Lidstone and Dr Uljarević – 11th June, 2011

- Prof. Leekam speaks at Three Counties Forum Meeting, Carmarthen – 8th June, 2011

- Prof. Leekam and Dr Uljarević - Invited talk on Wales Autism Research Centre to Cardiff and the Vale NAS Parent Group, Cardiff, 26th May 2011.

- Prof. Leekam – Invited talk on research at the Wales Autism Research Centre to Ashgrove School, Penarth, 18th May, 2011.
The Autism Cymru international conference, June 2011
Members of the Wales Autism Research Centre contributed to the organisation of the Autism Cymru international conference in June 2011. The whole team attended and assisted at the conference. Furthermore, the Wales Autism Research Centre hosted a stand for both days of the conference.

Non-academic visitors to WARC
- Dr. Michael Fitzpatrick, GP – 12th January, 2012
- Joy Northampton and Ruth Jenkins, teachers from Ashgrove School – 12th August, 2011
- Staff and students from Priory Coleg, Gwent visited Cardiff University to look around the centre and visit the mock scanner at CUBRIC – 13th June, 2011
- Open door week for parents and families – 30th May-3rd June 2011
- Anne Hodgson, Team Leader, Autism Support Team, Cardiff L.E.A – 20th May, 2011

Consultancy and Professional Engagements
Other consultancy and professional engagements (Prof. Leekam)
- Doctoral supervisory committee - Leuven University – 9th December, 2011
- PhD external examining – Cambridge University – 31st October, 2011
- External examining – Sussex University – 6th October, 2011
- PhD external examining – Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia – 26th September, 2011
- PhD external examining – University of Aberdeen- 18th August, 2011.
- External Examiner- Sussex University: MSc Programme in Experimental Psychology
- Chair on second day of Autism Cymru international conference – 22nd June, 2011.
- Visiting Professorial Fellow, Education Faculty Fellowship, University of Hong Kong, Feb-March, 2011.

Member of Cardiff University, School of Psychology Ethics Committee

Member of ESRC Peer Review College

Member of Stakeholder Group, Strategic Action Plan for Wales

Member of Management Committee, Learning Disability, Autism and Neurodevelopmental Disorders Network (LDAN).

Member of the National Autistic Society

Appointed to Board of Trustees, Autism Cymru.

Other consultancy and professional engagements (Research Associates and postgraduates)

Dr Carrington: ad hoc reviewer for: Autism Research and Brain

Dr Lidstone: ad hoc reviewer for: Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry and Developmental Science, small-grant reviewer for the Wellcome Trust, and rapporteur for the Economic and Social Research Council.

Dr Carrington: Public Engagement committee for the Neuroscience and Mental Health Research Institute

Dr Lidstone: Member of School of Psychology Board.

Continuing Professional Development

‘Getting published’ – Mrs Winn, 5th March, 2012

‘Be a better writer’ – Ms Kent, 16th & 23rd January, 2012

‘Effective Researcher: the next 90 days’ – Ms Kent, 17th January, 2012

Speech in Noise workshop – Dr White, 5th and 6th Jan, 2012

Graph theory workshop – Dr Carrington, 29th Nov, 2011

The WARC Team Away Day at St Fagans National History Museum. From right to left: Prof. Sue Leekam, Dr Louise White, Ms Donna Harris, Dr Sarah Carrington, Dr Miriam Cooper, and Dr Jane Lidstone
Donations

The Wales Autism Research Centre would like to thank Mrs A. Jones and the Aberporth Flower Arrangement Club for their donation to the centre, which will support our work in raising awareness of autism and autism research.

Front row, left-right: Prof. Sue Leekam, Dr Sarah Carrington, Beverley Winn; Back row, left-right: Dr Jane Lidstone, Dr Mirko Uljarevic, Rachel Kent, Dr Louise White