

Researchers to look at relationship between tinnitus and defects in the inner ear

Researchers at the University of Essex have received a three-year studentship from the Royal National Institute for Deaf People (RNID) to investigate the relationship between tinnitus and defects in the inner ear.

The award, worth over £69,000, has been given to the Hearing Research Laboratory based within the University's Department of Psychology. The research will be undertaken by Christine Tan, an audiologist, and supervised by Professor Ray Meddis from the Department, with co-supervisor Mr Don McFerran, a Consultant ENT Surgeon at Essex County Hospital.

Tinnitus is defined as the perception of persistent noise (such as buzzing or hissing) in the absence of any real sound. At present, there is no objective way of measuring it and no consensus on the cause or treatment of this condition. While early theories on the cause of tinnitus focused on the ear itself, later research concentrated on the hearing pathways within the brain.

Professor Meddis explains: 'Some recent studies have suggested that progress can be made using more sophisticated hearing tests. The Hearing Research Laboratory has been developing computerised hearing tests as part of the Hearing Dummy Project in a three-year study sponsored by the EPSRC. These tests are sensitive to minor abnormalities and will be used to investigate people with tinnitus.'

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