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Future needs for European hearing research

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It is appropriate to note in Heidelberg, from where Helmholtz's 'On the Sensation of Tone' was published in 1863, that European hearing research has a long and rich tradition of discovery. In modern times, however, the balance of influence has crossed the Atlantic. Nevertheless, European research continues to be very strong in many areas, and leads the world in applied psychoacoustics and auditory prostheses, among others. I will argue that European hearing research needs to focus on its strengths and to develop a culture of 'effective natural cooperation'. One of the great strengths, and responsibilities, of our community is our system of largely nationalised health services. This provides opportunities for translational research on a large and well-funded scale. Public health commissioners seek an evidence base that, in my own research field of children's auditory processing disorder (APD), contrasts sharply with practice in the US. There, clinical practice has been converted into diagnostic and treatment practices that lack an evidence base. Our own, government-sponsored research into APD offers an alternative, population-based assessment. Our intention is to use this as a conduit for trans-European collaboration that could produce scientifically valid, tangible and cutting-edge results. But we must beware of artificial collaborations, made primarily to extract Euros from our EU paymasters. The first question to ask in planning any research collaboration is 'who do I need to work with?' This is what I mean by 'natural cooperation'. By focussing our efforts, and by interacting in meetings such as this, the chances of that 'who' being another member of the EU are, of course, greatly enhanced. A current venture to form a new audiological research core in Europe promises further to promote interactions thereby leading to genuine cooperation.

