
PRESS RELEASE

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LEARNING AND SKILLS COUNCIL FUNDS BETTER SUPPORT FOR DEAF CHILDREN IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

The support given to deaf children in schools and colleges in the south west is set to improve after the Deaf Academy in Exeter was awarded a grant by the Learning and Skills Council (LSC). The grant will enable the Academy to offer up to half-price training in British Sign Language (BSL) to those who work with deaf children. Sign Language can be studied at four different levels, ranging from an equivalent of a GCSE to certificate level. Levels 1,2 and 3 will now be half their normal price, saving over £1,000 on one of the Level 3 courses.

Jonathan Farnhill, Chief Executive of the Academy, believes the grant will make a big difference to the lives of deaf children. "At the Academy I see first-hand the difference British Sign Language can make to deaf children. Every day I see our students thrive in a teaching and learning environment where there is no communication barrier. This is an opportunity which all deaf children should have. We are very grateful to the LSC for making this more affordable. We are sure this will increase the skills of those who work with deaf children, and that will help the children achieve more. It has often been a real struggle for parents and local authorities in the south west to find good quality, affordable and accessible training in BSL. This grant from the LSC will change that".

The Academy is part of a national consortium that has been given funding by the Government to improve sign language levels amongst those who work with deaf children. Deaf children without additional needs often achieve less than hearing children, despite having the same level of ability. The 'attainment gap' is bigger in the south west than in any other area except London. One of the probable factors behind this is the low level of British Sign Language skills of those who work within schools supporting deaf children. In a recent report by the National Deaf Children's Society¹, nearly 80% of parents said their deaf child received communication support from someone with, at best, a Level 1 BSL qualification. This means that often the person who works with the deaf child will have a lower qualification in BSL than the subject the deaf child is studying.

The government grant for £800,000 has led to the establishment of I-Sign, a consortium of charities and educational providers who are working together to improve these levels. The I-Sign project will

¹ National Deaf Children's Society report, 'must do better', published June 2008
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develop a new course for Communication Support Workers who support deaf children in mainstream schools and colleges; create a Family Sign Language curriculum for families with deaf children; create a teacher training course for deaf tutors and expand the number of British Sign Language tutors and courses available to those who work with deaf children.

As part of the I-Sign project, Exeter Deaf Academy has been working closely with the Royal National Institute for the Deaf to develop more sign language courses in the south west. It is now able to offer these courses at up to half price thanks to the LSC grant. Level 1 courses, delivered in 2 hour lessons for 26 weeks, now cost £157 as opposed to £350. Level 2 courses, delivered in 3 hour lessons for 31 weeks, now cost £307 as opposed to £500. Level 3 Certificate courses, delivered over 20 days, now cost £883 as opposed to £1840. Level 3 studied as an NVQ, delivered over 7 days now cost £504 as opposed to £1049.

The courses are delivered in Exeter, although courses can be delivered in other parts of the south west if there is sufficient demand. Further information on the courses can be obtained from Lori Fox at the Academy on 01392 267072 or by emailing her at lfox@exeterdeafacademy.ac.uk

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SUPPORTING PHOTOGRAPH



John Mancini, BSL Manager at the Academy, is photographed teaching sign language to the Minister for Special Educational Needs, Diana Johnson at the launch of the I-Sign project on 25th June 2009.

About Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education

Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education are specialists in educating deaf children. The Academy runs a school and college that provides education to students aged from 4-24, through either day places or weekly boarding, with a current student roll of approximately 120. From September it will be hosting St Leonard's pre-school, where deaf and hearing children will learn and play together. It also provides other opportunities for deaf and hearing children to learn together, notably through its hairdressing salon, car mechanics course and Hospitality and Catering. The Academy occupies a large site near Exeter city centre, and has provided education to deaf children for over 180 years.

For further information on this media story contact:

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