



## **Sign Language skills in the South West set to soar**

***Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education** is part of the largest ever sign language project focused on the needs of deaf children.*

A consortium of deaf charities and educational establishments was recently awarded almost £800,000 by the government to ensure the future provision and improve the status of British Sign Language (BSL) for deaf children in England.

Government funding will allow the consortium to run a two year project to help families with deaf children learn BSL skills. The project will also ensure that communication support workers who assist deaf children in the classroom have higher skills, and will increase the number of BSL teachers, courses and interpreters.

Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education is hosting the first of the project events in the area with a free development lunch on Thursday, March 5<sup>th</sup>. Teachers of BSL are invited to come along and find out about working with families, gaining professional qualifications and the teaching of sign language at the highest level. Interested people can book their place by emailing [LFox@exeterdeafacademy.ac.uk](mailto:LFox@exeterdeafacademy.ac.uk).

Jonathan Farnhill, Chief Executive, says:

“The Academy is delighted to be involved in raising the profile of British Sign Language. This event, for existing teachers of BSL, is just the first of many activities. At the Academy we have already been heavily investing in the sign language skills of our own staff and soon aim to be able to offer BSL classes at the upper levels for the general public”.

Until now, the communication needs of deaf children using BSL at home and in school have been overlooked. There is currently no national framework for children and families to learn BSL, this has left too many parents struggling to communicate with their deaf children. The lack of teachers and courses in BSL also affects the quality of support that these deaf children receive as they go through their early years, school and the transition into adulthood.

Louise Cole, NDCS SW Director says:

“This project will make a huge difference to the lives of deaf children who use sign language. At present too many deaf children are excluded from so much in both their home lives and at school, because they can not communicate with those around them. Their families and the professionals working with them are also left frustrated and upset that they don’t know how to communicate effectively with them to help them learn, develop and feel valued and included.

Simon Wilkinson-Blake, BDA Chief Executive adds:

“As a community united by the use of British Sign Language, our members know only too well from personal experience the very significant communication barriers currently felt by deaf children, their families and the professionals working with them. We hope that this project leaves a lasting legacy of benefits, not only for this generation of deaf children, but for future generations as well.”

The consortium represents a unique partnership of national and regional organisations, each one bringing a great deal of experience and expertise to the project. All partners have excellent links throughout the deafness field and with education professionals.

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**Notes to editors**

The consortium, which includes the BDA, CACDP, Exeter Royal Academy for Deaf Education, Merseyside Society for Deaf People (MSDP), National Deaf Children's Society (NDCS), RNID and UCLAN, will work to rectify the vast lack of sign language provision and will aim to raise greater awareness of BSL as a communication option for families with deaf children.

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- NDCS is the national charity dedicated to creating a world without barriers for deaf children and young people. We represent the interests and campaign for the rights of all deaf children and young people from birth to independence.
- NDCS believes that the family is the most important influence on a deaf child's development. NDCS supports the deaf child through the family as well as directly supporting deaf children and young people themselves.
- Three babies are born deaf every day and 90 per cent of deaf children are born to hearing parents with little experience of deafness.
- There are 35,000 deaf children in the UK.
- Parents with concerns about their child's hearing can contact the NDCS Freephone Helpline on 0808 800 8880 (voice and text) or email [helpline@ndcs.org.uk](mailto:helpline@ndcs.org.uk) open 10am – 5pm Monday to Friday, or access the website at [www.ndcs.org.uk](http://www.ndcs.org.uk)

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### **BDA Notes to Editors**

- The BDA is the largest Deaf organisation in the UK that is run by Deaf people. It represents the Sign Language community, which is united by shared experiences, history and, most importantly, by British Sign Language (BSL).
- The BDA wants to see a society where Sign Language users have the same rights, responsibilities, opportunities and quality of life as everyone else. BSL was recognised as an official British language on 18th March 2003, but it still does not have any legal protection. This means that Deaf Sign Language users do not have full access to vital information and services, including education, health and employment. The BDA wants to see an end to this.

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### **Signature Notes to Editors:**

Signature is a professional registration body and recognised UK awarding body offering qualifications in sign languages and other methods of communication used by deaf and deafblind people. Our qualifications are accredited by the Office of the Qualifications and Examinations Regulator (Ofqual) and appear on the National Qualifications Framework and today more than 600 communications professionals working with deaf and deafblind people choose Signature as their professional registration body.

Signature wants to see a society in which deaf and deafblind people have full access. Our commitment to share knowledge and recognise skills in the languages and communication methods used by deaf and deafblind people can be seen in all that we do.

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### **RNID Notes to editors**

RNID is the largest charity working to change the world for the UK's nine million deaf and hard of hearing people. We do this with the help of our members by campaigning and lobbying, raising awareness of deafness and hearing loss, providing services and through social, medical and technical research.

For further information about RNID or to become a member, visit

[www.rnid.org.uk](http://www.rnid.org.uk), contact RNID's Information Line on 0808 808 0123 (freephone) 0808 808 9000 (textphone) 0780 0000 360 (SMS) or email [informationline@rnid.org.uk](mailto:informationline@rnid.org.uk).

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