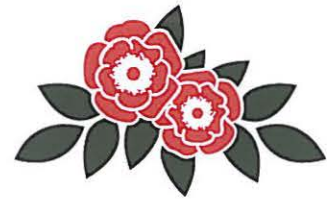


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Sign of the Times

Jobs Boost for Deaf Community on Merseyside

The Department of Education and Social Science at the University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) has signed a landmark contract with the Merseyside Society for Deaf People (MSDP) that will boost employment prospects for Deaf people across Merseyside and the North West.

'Merseysign', backed by Greater Merseyside Learning & Skills Council and the Objective 1 European Social Fund Programme (Government Office North West) is a three-year project that will offer 36 students an opportunity to develop British Sign Language (BSL) and Interpreting skills and to support Deaf people in a variety of workplaces across the region. UCLan's Deaf Studies Team will deliver two training programmes for the MSDP with 18 students on each programme.

The long-term aim of the project is to increase the economic activity and employability of Deaf people on Merseyside and beyond, giving them greater access to paid employment, promotion and training.

John Brennan, Chief Executive of the Merseyside Society for Deaf People, said: "Thousands of deaf people on Merseyside use sign language but from the high street to the job centre, there is a massive shortfall of interpreters. It's not surprising that deaf people are twice as likely to be unemployed as people in general. Thanks to the Merseysign project, we will soon be in a position to reverse this trend. An added bonus is that through the creation of a niche market SME, we'll also be able to provide guaranteed employment opportunities for Sign Language Interpreters on Merseyside and the North West."

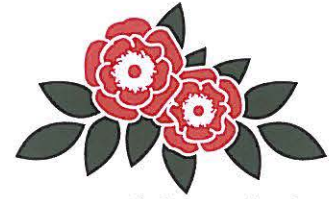
There are currently only 199 Members of the Register of BSL/English Interpreters (MRSLI) in Britain to serve an estimated 70,000 Deaf BSL users. In a recent research project undertaken by UCLan's Deaf Studies Department, one deaf interviewee revealed that, in 36 years of employment with the same company, he had never had access to an interpreter.

Frank Harrington, Senior Lecturer in Deaf Studies at UCLan, said the implications of the Disability Discrimination Act were now beginning to bite. "The Government has recently recognised BSL as an official UK language and employers are increasingly being made aware of their legal obligations towards deaf employees.

-more to follow-

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However there is still a critical skills shortage in the UK for BSL interpreters. 'Merseysign' will enable the region to take significant steps towards improving the situation of Deaf people living on Merseyside."

A picture opportunity will be available at the Merseyside Society for Deaf People, Queens Drive, West Derby L13 0DJ on Friday 17 October at 2.00pm.

Notes to Editor

The Merseyside Society for Deaf People has delivered services and support to the Deaf Community on Merseyside for 100 years. It offers a professional 'one stop shop' of services and its vision is to continually improve communication and services that will enable Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing people to be fully empowered. Many of the staff are themselves Deaf, Deafened and Hard of Hearing.

UCLan is one of the best-known centres for sign language learning and interpreting in the UK. It is a centre of excellence in Deaf Studies, sign language interpreting and one of the largest providers of BSL teaching in the North West region.

Figures for the Royal National Institute for the Deaf show that more than three million people of working age (16-65) are deaf or hard of hearing. 153,000 of these are severely or profoundly deaf.

British Sign Language (BSL) is the first or preferred language of around 70,000 people in the UK.

About 2 million people in Britain wear hearing aids, maybe another million would benefit from doing so. Almost all deaf and hard of hearing people rely on lip reading to some extent.

The British Deaf Association's 'Learn to Sign' Week 2003 is currently taking place.

For further information contact:

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Frank Harrington at the Department of Deaf Studies at the University of Central Lancashire on: 01772 89 3701

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