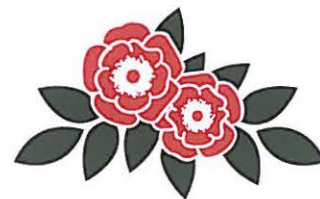


NEWS RELEASE

UNIVERSITY
— OF CENTRAL —
LANCASHIRE



University celebrates as BSL becomes official

Deaf students, lecturers from the Deaf Studies programme and staff from the Specialised Learning Resource Unit at the University of Central Lancashire are celebrating last week's Government announcement that it now recognises British Sign Language as a language in its own right.

UCLan lays claim to the largest Deaf student population in the country and many of the students have been prominent in the campaign to secure government recognition of BSL. They were delighted when Andrew Smith, the Secretary of State for the Department of Work and Pensions, and Maria Eagle, Minister for Disabled People made their announcement on 18th March.

The Government now understands that BSL users want their language to be protected and promoted, in the same way that other minority languages are, by the Council of Europe's Charter for Regional or Minority Languages. The Ministers said they will give careful consideration to any proposals which the Council of Europe might make.

At UCLan, dozens of Deaf students are enrolled on courses across the University, and the Deaf Studies team runs several degree courses which are popular among Deaf and hearing students. UCLan is also the only higher education establishment in the country which offers a post-graduate diploma for sign language interpreters.

"Staff here have devoted much of their working careers to this issue," says Graham Turner, Senior Lecturer in Deaf Studies at UCLan. "We have worked alongside partners nationally and internationally, to enhance understanding and, through our research, to develop the evidence base for a more enlightened policy framework in relation to sign language. This is a real milestone achievement for the Deaf community.

"The lack of recognition of BSL really was a fundamental problem for the Deaf community because if people fail to recognise a person's language, they also fail to recognise something that's absolutely crucial to that person's identity.

-more follows-

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“The challenge is now to turn Government rhetoric, and an initial £1million of dedicated funding, into a reality in which Deaf people’s human rights are fully acknowledged and quality access to all areas of public life is comprehensively resourced and delivered.”

Other organisations such as the British Deaf Association (BDA), the Federation of Deaf People (FDP) and the UK Council on Deafness also expressed their delight at the government announcement.

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26th March 2003

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