



SIGNTEACH

Sign Language Teaching in Europe

Report & Recommendations



Erasmus+

Sign Language Teaching In Europe

Report & Recommendations

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Foreword

by Markku Jokinen

As the President of the European Union of the Deaf (EUD), I am delighted at the opportunity to introduce this publication to you.

This is probably the first book that focuses on sign language teaching on a European level, through bringing many teaching experts from various European countries together in partnership to gather experience and materials, which formulates the basis of this book.

This field is not unfamiliar to me, indeed, I have researched this field in depth during my studies at the University of Rochester (postgraduate work in Linguistics, Psycholinguistics, and Sign Language Linguistics). In addition to this, I am currently working on a national level doing advocacy work as Director of the Finnish Association of the Deaf, together with the Finnish authorities we are working on the 'Language Policy Programme of National Sign Languages in Finland'.

I am very aware of the importance of carrying out research such as the work completed in this book. The key is raising

awareness of the need for such research to reinforce the importance for the professionalisation of jobs revolving around sign language teaching. The work completed in this book is essential, as to compare the results from the participating countries and to analyse, or even one step further, opinions expressed by various experts as done in these pages, will bring the profession of sign language teaching one step further.

I am confident that many users will find various uses of this book and that it can serve as a useful tool for all stakeholders at all levels, whether at the EU level or on a national level. But, more importantly, a tool that we wished to have earlier, a tool which will be the working basis for the next generation of sign language teachers.

Dr. Markku Jokinen, President, European Union of the Deaf (EUD)

29 September 2017

First steps:

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- based learners (a

- created 10 real

Deaf community

2. Materials

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- filmed materi

- project team

3. Methodology

- UK led



Summary

This report is one of the outputs of the SignTeach project, a European project funded under Erasmus+. SignTeach was a project for and by sign language teachers. It was a 3-year project that started in September 2014.

In this report, you will find some background information about the SignTeach project (Chapter 3) and the SignTeach Survey (Chapter 4).

You are reading this publication, so you are interested in sign language. Maybe you are a sign language user, a sign language teacher, or a sign language interpreter. However, we hope that many people with little or no previous experience with sign languages will read this publication too. For them, we included Chapter 2 with everything you've always wanted to ask about sign language.

The main part of this publication are the country reports (Chapter 5) with current information about sign language teaching and the training of sign language teachers in the 8 European countries that participated in the SignTeach project. In alphabetical order: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, and the UK.

For each country, you will find a short historical overview, some information about the training of sign language teachers, accreditation, and more. We included short interviews with experts from each of these 8 countries. For each country also: some results of the SignTeach Survey. More results and interviews can be found on the [SignTeach website](#).

In the final and most important chapter of this report, Chapter 6, you will find our conclusions recommendations. For 3 years, SignTeach partners met bi-annually to develop new resources for colleagues in Europe, but also to discuss current and future barriers that sign language teachers and sign language learners have to deal with, not just in our countries, but across Europe. And maybe globally. Although sign languages are generally recognized as a valued and vital element of European culture, they are in need of support and protection. By whom, and how? This you can read in Chapter 6.



1 Introduction



Frankie Picron and David Hay, EUD, summarized chapters of this report in International Sign. You can access the online signed summaries by clicking on the David's picture; or click here for the online version of this report.

The sign languages of the EU are recognised as fully fledged indigenous languages of the European Union (Leeson, 2006) and are an important part of Europe's multilingual diversity.



It is estimated that there are approximately 750.000 deaf sign language users in the EU (Sign Language Legislation in the European Union, 2012); the total number of sign language users (including hearing people) is several times larger.

In order to ensure that deaf people are able to work and learn in their preferred language, the European Commission, in concert with the European Parliament, has taken steps to promote sign

language and to give sign language an official status.

Recently, November 2016, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on Sign Languages and professional Sign Language Interpreters ([2016/2952\(RSP\)](#)). It includes (item 24) a call on the Member States "to encourage the learning of sign language in the same way as foreign languages."

For deaf sign language users to be able to work and learn in their preferred language - a sign language - professional sign language teachers are needed to teach sign language to parents of deaf children (most parents of deaf children are hearing, with no previous knowledge of sign language), other family members, friends, teachers, colleagues, as well as for the training of professional sign language interpreters.

The SignTeach project

In 2014, 11 organisations from 8 European countries joined forces to develop an Open Educational Resource for sign language teachers: the SignTeach website (www.signteach.eu). The project was funded under the Erasmus+ Programme (KA2 2014-1-NL01-KA200-001279).

Objectives

One of the objectives of the SignTeach project was to find out more about sign language teachers and sign language teaching in Europe. At the start of the project there was little or no collaboration between sign language teachers across borders, or even nationally. It was—and still is—unknown how many sign language teachers there are in each country, who they are, how they are trained, and how and where they work. What are their wishes? What are the barriers that they have to deal with? What are good practices that they want to share with their colleagues?

The SignTeach Survey

The SignTeach Survey - an online survey published in written English and International Sign - tried to find answers to these questions.

Results

What we found was not encouraging. Many sign language teachers have had little or no formal or even informal training for teaching a sign language. Teachers report that they develop 50% or more of the materials that they use, themselves. In some countries, sign language teaching is considered more like a hobby or voluntary work, rather

than as a profession and a viable career option. Many sign language teachers work on their own, without or with only occasional contacts with other sign language teachers.

In this report, you can find some of the results of the Survey and the interviews that we had with experts. On the SignTeach website, you will find more information as well as videos of sign language teachers at work (www.signteach.eu).

New developments

Since the start of the SignTeach project in 2014, there have been some promising developments, for instance, the international Lesico conferences for sign language teachers and the recently established European Network of Sign Language Teachers (www.enslt.eu).

At the same time, we see major threats. Although we do not have hard data to support this, most experts who we consulted agree that fewer and fewer people learn sign language as a first language. Without native signers, sign languages are at risk of soon being taught as 'dead' or extinct languages, like Latin.

And in the longer term, of not being used and taught at all?

Overview

In the next chapter, you will find some background information about sign languages, and what YOU can do to support sign languages and sign language users. In later chapters, you will find results of the SignTeach Survey and the interviews that we had with experts in the countries of the SignTeach partners.

Although the Survey was completed by over 240 sign language teachers from across Europe, unfortunately, we did not have sufficient data for sophisticated statistical analyses, for instance to compare countries or subgroups.

For this report, we focused on the countries of the SignTeach partners. In alphabetical order: Belgium (BE), the Czech Republic (CZ), Germany (DE), Iceland (IS), Italy (IT), the Netherlands (NL), Norway (NO) and the United Kingdom

(UK).

We compared the data of these 8 countries with the average data of all countries. We interviewed experts in these countries and asked them for their viewpoints and recommendations.

Main conclusion

In this introduction, we can already tell you the main conclusion of the SignTeach project and the SignTeach Survey: much, much more needs to be done - at local, regional, national and European level - to support sign languages and sign language teaching.

Conclusions & Recommendations

In a way, this report ends with a 'cliff hanger': What is going to happen, next?

This, we cannot tell you. In the final chapter, Chapter 6, we WILL tell you what we WANT to happen: our conclusions and recommendations.





2. Sign Language: Everything

you've always wanted to ask ...



Sign language?

Sign language, is that a real language? Yes. Actually, it is not one language, but many. Each country has its own national sign language and in some countries, more than one sign language.

Only deaf people use sign language?

No. Sign languages originated in communities of deaf people, but now probably more hearing than deaf people learn or use a sign language. Some reports state that American Sign language is now the fourth most taught second language in the USA.

Who invented sign language?

No one did. Sign languages are natural languages that originated in communities of deaf people, centuries ago. Sign languages evolve, change over time, have regional dialects, and subgroups of sign language users develop their own sign vocabularies. But these changes happen as a natural process, in the same way that spoken languages evolve.

Is sign language universal, is it an international language?

Hearing people often say: “Wouldn’t it be much easier, if all sign language users used the same sign language?”

Well, yes. Then again, it would be even more efficient if all hearing people worldwide would use the same spoken language. Better yet: if everyone, hearing and deaf, would use the same sign language! But no, we don’t expect that that is going to happen anytime soon.

Who learns sign language?

Many people do. Children who are born in families where sign language is used, learn sign language naturally, in the same way that hearing children acquire the spoken language of their parents. Relatives, friends, colleagues of deaf sign language users often learn to sign. People may learn to sign for their job, for instance to work as a sign language interpreter. In some countries, sign language can be learned in secondary schools and at universities, as a second language.

Learning a sign language is different and exciting: you learn to express yourself without using your voice. Instead, you use your hands, face and body.

Who teaches sign language?

In the past, sign language, or a form of ‘sign supported speech’ was taught by hearing people, often the clergy. In the second half of the last century, deaf people claimed their language and started to teach sign language, themselves. Most of them however had not been trained as a teacher; in most countries, each teacher developed his/her own materials and curriculum.

In some countries this has changed in recent years, and sign language is again taught by hearing teachers. One of the objectives of the SignTeach project and this report was to find out more about these changes.

Can you compare sign languages to spoken minority languages?

Yes and no. Yes, because sign language users are a minority in each country. No, because most minority languages are a majority language in *some* country or region. The only place where sign language users are in the majority is within the Deaf Community.

Another important difference: most sign language users did not, and in many cases do not, acquire sign language from parent-to-child but from peer-to-peer interaction, or by explicit instruction.

For many deaf people, a visual sign language is the only language that is 100% accessible. This means that sign languages are not only the preferred language of most deaf people, they also constitute a ‘reasonable accommodation’ that makes it possible for deaf people to realize their human rights — civil, political, economic, social, cultural—and to participate on an equal basis in society ([United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), 2006).

Are sign languages endangered languages?

Again yes and no. In many countries, the number of people who learn a sign language as a first language is shrinking. No, because in many countries, the number of people who learn a sign language as a second language is growing. However, without a sufficient number of native signers, sign languages *are* at risk of extinction.

According to Ethnologue (www.ethnologue.com) most European sign languages are ‘developing’ languages (status 5), which means “The language is in vigorous use, with literature in a standardized form being used by some though this is not yet widespread or sustainable.” Yet in some European countries, for instance in Iceland, sign language has the status of ‘threatened’: “The language is

used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but it is losing users.” From ‘developing’ language to ‘threatened’, or vice versa?

Would it be so terrible if sign languages become extinct?

Yes, for several reasons.

- It is always a bad thing, when a language is no longer used. It is especially bad in the case of sign languages, because sign languages represent a different ‘species’ of languages with very special characteristics that are worth preserving.
- Yes, because sign languages are the only languages that deaf children can acquire naturally, without intervention.
- And yes, because without sign languages, deaf people are not only deprived of their language, but also of their culture and for many: their identities. And, last but not least: of the ‘reasonable accommodation’ that enables them to realize their human rights and to participate on an equal basis in mainstream society.

What can you do?

Everyone

Please read this report. Please forward it to colleagues, policymakers, everyone you know, to help us disseminate our message.

EU policymakers

Please read this report. Find out more about sign language users and sign language teaching in your country. Actively support EU and national actions to promote and support sign language users, sign language teaching.

Sign language teachers and their trainers

Please read this report. Use the information in this report and on the website to become a better, more professional sign language teacher. Learn from the good examples. Use this report and the [SignTeach website](#) as a launching pad for national and transnational collaboration.

Sign language users

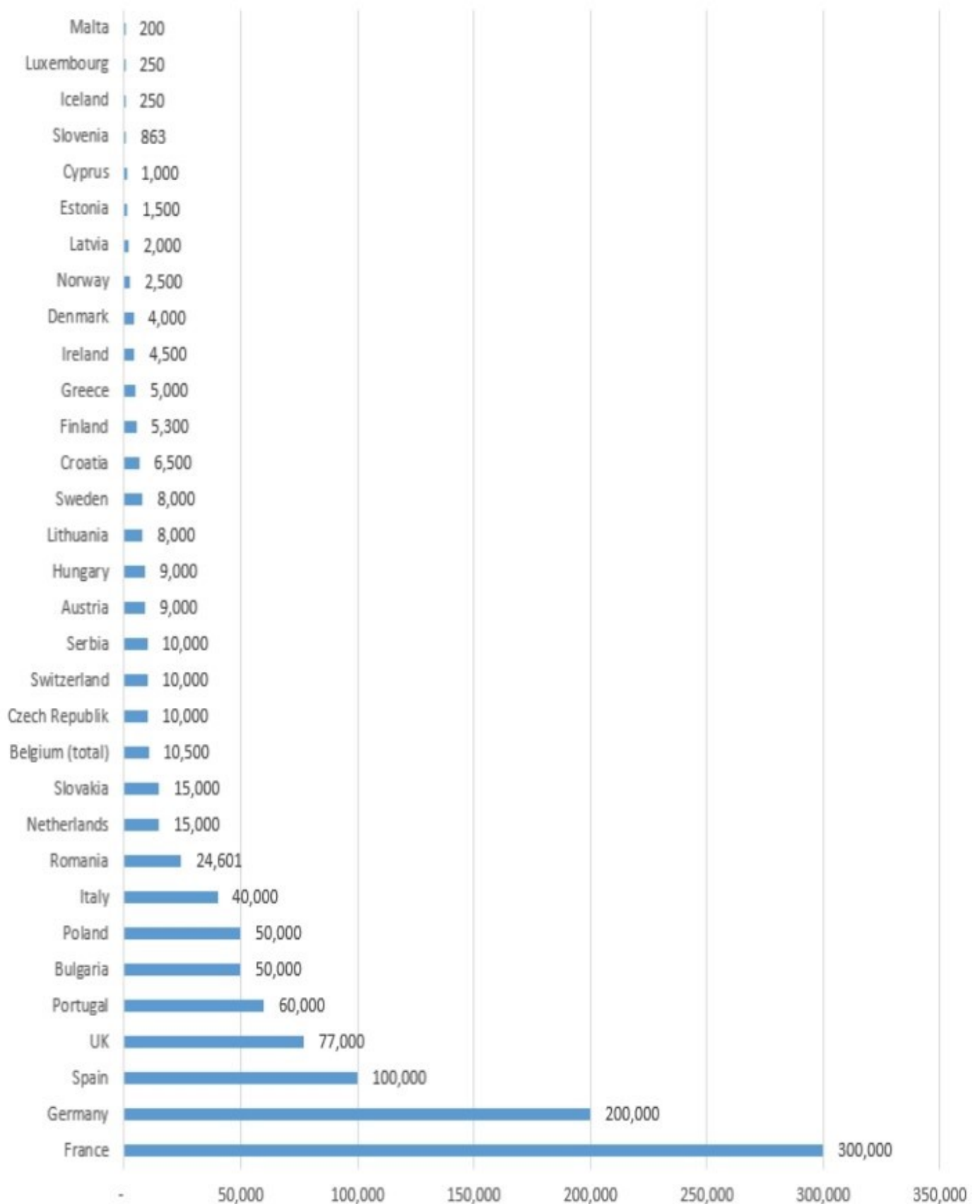
Please read this report. Be proud to be a sign language user. Be a role model for other sign language users. Know that, without sign language users like you, sign languages are at risk of extinction.

Our message?

European sign languages are an inalienable part of Europe’s heritage, culture, and society. In many countries, sign languages are endangered languages and at risk of extinction.

We – all of us - must do everything we can to promote and support sign languages, sign language users, sign language teachers.

Number of Deaf Sign Language Users per Country



www.eud.eu, DECEMBER 2016



3. SignTeach: the Project



The project

The official name of the SignTeach project is: Sign Language Teachers in Europe: an Open Educational Resource. It was an EU project funded under the Erasmus+ Programme (project number: KA2 2014-1-NL01-KA200-001279).

SignTeach was a 3 year project, the starting date was September 2014.

Consortium

The consortium consisted of 11 organisations from 8 European countries. You can find the names of the partners on page 131 of this report and on the [Sign-Teach website](#).

Most of the participants are members of the project's target group: deaf sign language teachers.

Transnational consortium meetings were always interesting and stimulating. Many of the photos in this report were taken at these meetings.

Good examples

The original plan had been to interview sign language teachers and sign language students. This plan was immediately rejected at the kick-off meeting. Too static, not visual enough. Our target group wants to SEE what we want to tell them. So partners recorded what we call "Good Examples": short videos of sign language teachers interacting with different learner groups. To make the videos more accessible, we added introductions in International Sign and the national sign language of the teacher in the video.





To give more background information, we also added Comment videos. During the lifetime of the project, 40 Good Examples were produced and posted on the website.

Resources

We collected information about the sign languages of Europe, about relevant organisations, funding options, materials.

Teacher Skills

We discussed “Teacher Skills”: what are the skills that a sign language teacher needs? Together, we selected 4 * 7 skills, and produced videos to describe these.

Podcasts

Last but not least, partners produced 40 video “podcasts”: short presentations in International Sign with information that they want to share with colleagues across the EU.

Website, Facebook

This report is the final output of the Sign-Teach project. Partners will remain active, follow-up projects are being planned. You can find all information on the website,

www.signteach.eu

and on our Facebook page:

www.facebook.com/signteach/



4 ● SignTeach: the Survey



Who to ask?

To find out more about sign language teachers and sign language teaching in Europe we wanted to collect quantitative and qualitative data from all countries in Europe.

We surfed the net and consulted our networks, but in many countries sign language teachers are not organized. There is no register of sign language teachers, and in many countries, not even a national organisation of sign language teachers. When we found sites for or by sign language teachers, the information was usually only available in the national sign language and/or national written language. Even with Google's help, these sites rarely answered the many questions that we had.

We asked the European Union of the Deaf to help. "Can you please ask all your members to provide us with the information that we want?" The members of the EUD are national Deaf Organisations – and the EUD told us that most of these have little or nothing to do with sign language *teaching*.

We tried to find 2 or 3 experts in each country to consult. But in many countries, there are no generally recognized

experts in this field. In some countries, there ARE competing factions or parties. WHO we'd consult would determine WHAT they'd tell us about their country.

Online Survey

So we decided for a grassroots approach. We would ask the sign language teachers themselves. We developed an online survey for sign language teachers in Europe. The survey could not be too long, What were the most important questions to ask?

Questions had to be relevant and easy to understand for sign language teachers across Europe.

Most questions would have to be multiple choice questions, because many sign language teachers are not able to write in English and even with the help of Google translate it would be difficult for us to deal with answers in many different languages.

The questions had to be about the personal experiences of the sign language teachers themselves, because each teacher is an expert when it concerns his/her own situation.

Ultimately, we agreed on 3 major topics and 22 questions.

Three topics

The three main topics are:

1. Information about the respondents. Are they deaf or hearing? How old? How many years of experience?
2. Information about their work. Who do they teach? At what level? How many hours per month? What materials do they use?
3. Information about their training. What training had they had? What were their wishes, for further training?



1. Do you teach sign language?
 Yes No

International Sign

The questions were signed in national Sign by David Hay (EUD) and published in English and International Sign on the SignTeach website, August 2015. We used our networks, social media, conferences and personal contacts to get as many sign language teachers from across Europe to answer the questions of the Survey.

Over 240 responses

Early 2017, we had almost 275 responses. Some were by people who were not sign language teachers. We excluded their answers from the analysis. Some were from sign language teachers outside of Europe. It was good to see that sign language teachers from countries as far away and as diverse as the US, South Korea, Liberia, Australia and Chile took the trouble to answer our questions, but we did not include their responses in our analysis.

Ultimately (May 2017), 243 sign language teachers from across Europe had completed the Survey. Enough to get an overall impression of similarities and differences, but not enough for sophisticated statistical analyses.

For this report, we focused on the eight countries of the SignTeach partners. In alphabetical order: Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Iceland, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and the UK. We compared the data of these countries with the 'average' data of all countries.

Representative?

A considerable number, 243 responses, but the main target group of the SignTeach project proved very difficult to reach. Most sign language teachers in Europe do not read and write English. For



international communication, deaf sign language teachers who completed the Survey say they prefer International Sign to English.

To reach the majority of sign language teachers, however, we should have presented the Survey questions in the national sign languages of our target group. Unfortunately, we did not have the resources to do this.

As a result, the Survey was mostly completed by sign language teachers with many international contacts and/or working in academic settings. Sign language teachers who work independently, in adult education programmes or in informal settings are probably under-represented in the Survey.

Country Reports

Consortium partners supplemented the Survey data with a short historical over-

view of the situation in their country and with interviews with experts. For the eight countries represented in the consortium, you will therefore find more elaborate descriptions in this report.

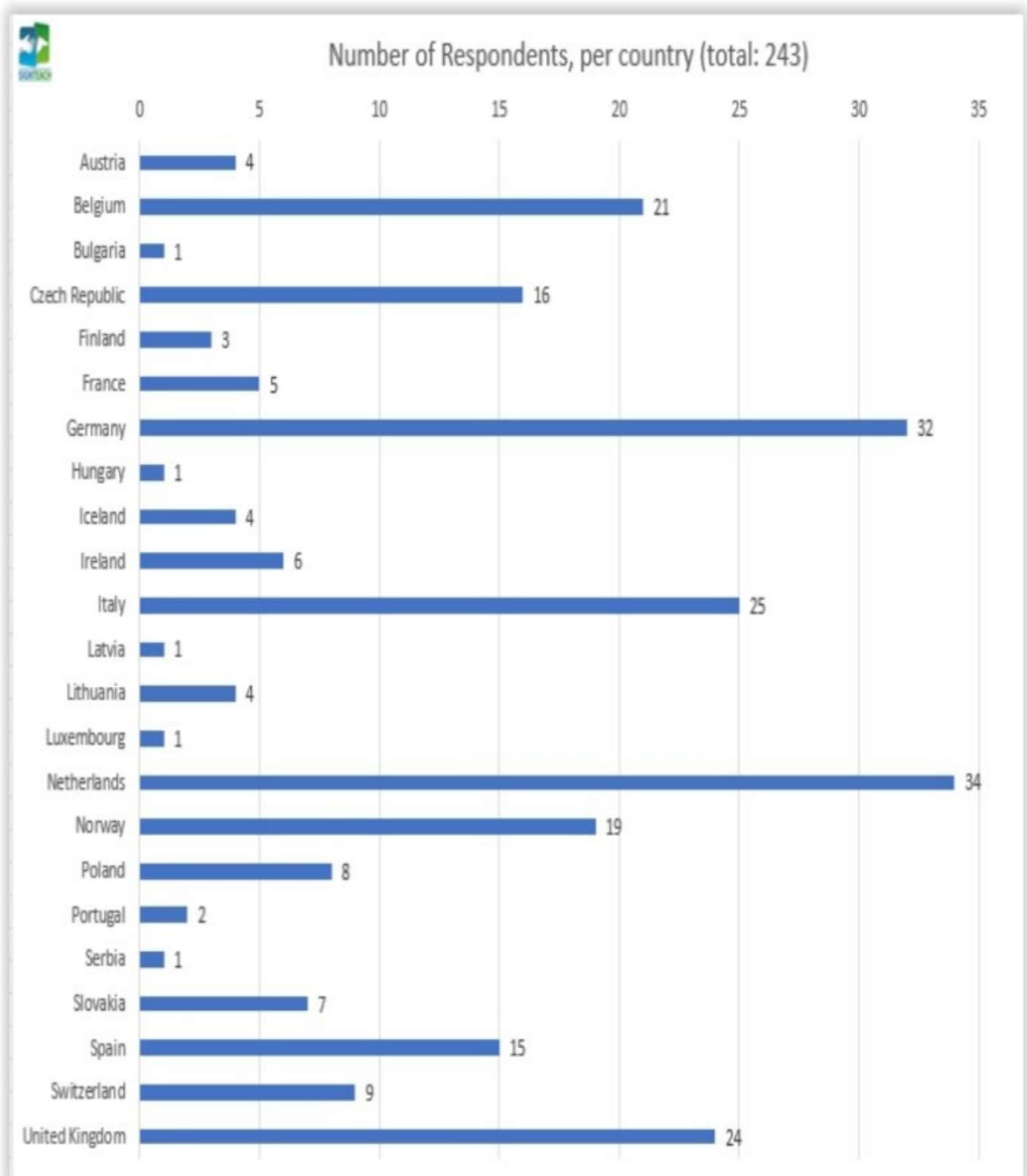
Main conclusions of the Survey

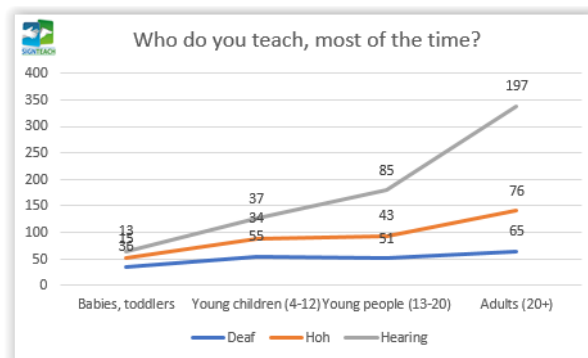
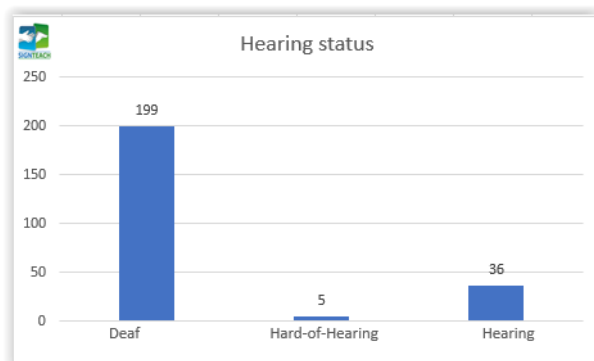
1. There are major differences between countries, but also within countries;
2. In many countries, the majority of the respondents say that they are very much in need of more training, more materials, more support and more national and international collaboration.
3. Respondents appreciate the Sign-Teach initiative and website, but many indicate that they need (much) more: more information, more information in their national sign language, more contacts with other sign language teachers, as well as answers to sometimes very specific questions.

Results SignTeach Survey: Europe

Number of respondents:

243 respondents, from 23 European countries.





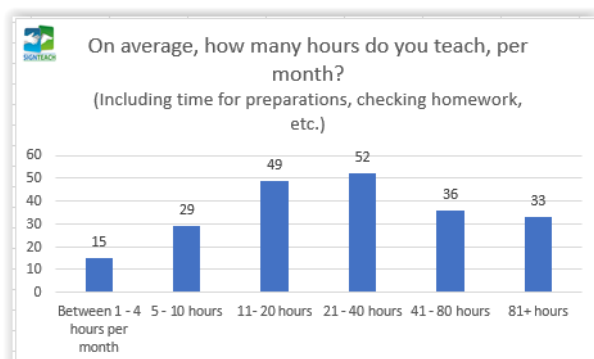
Hearing Status

83% of the respondents are deaf, 15% are hearing, with major differences between countries. In some countries, 100% of the respondents are deaf, in the Netherlands, 53% of the respondents are hearing.



Native signers?

Most of the deaf sign language teachers are native signers and learned to sign before their fourth birthday. Over 40% of the hearing respondents however, learned to sign after age 20.



How many hours do you teach, per month?

For most respondents, sign language teaching is not a full-time job.

Who do you teach, most of the time?

The largest group of learners are hearing adults. In all age-groups, deaf learners (blue line) are a minority.

Open question: Good advice?

“More attention for teaching deaf children (and their family), they are the future and they have no-one to teach them sign language! Especially not in these times of integration.”

“I hope that more and more sign language teachers receive a good education and state certification. I would like to have a standard like the CERF and a platform to exchange our views/experiences.”

Open question: Barriers?

“Everything: very little support, few deaf people (one year ago a new deaf colleague at my work, but we have too much work so we hardly can work together), no platform with other deaf teachers (all too busy and systems that are too different), hearing environment, hearing education (learning hearing didactic methods), didactic and material for spoken languages,...”

More results on www.signteach.eu





Country Reports



Country Report

5.1 Belgium



5.1 Belgium—Flanders

Myriam Vermeerbergen & Kristof de Weerdt, KU Leuven (BE)

Flanders

Flanders is situated in the northern part of Belgium and its most common spoken language is Dutch, whereas in Wallonia, the southern part of Belgium, mostly French is used. In the past, there was only one Belgian Deaf Federation, NAVEKADOS (the ‘National Federation of Catholic Deaf–Mutes’). However, in the 1970s, as a result of the political process of federalization in Belgium, the national federation was divided up into Fevlado (Federatie van Vlaamse Dovenorganisaties) (the ‘Association of Flemish Deaf Organisations’) and the Fédération Francophone des Sourds de Belgique (FFSB). Since then contacts between Flemish and Walloon deaf people have become less and less frequent and the sign language varieties used in both communities diverged.

In 2000, Fevlado decided on the official name for the sign language used in Flanders, Belgium: Vlaamse Gebarentaal (‘Flemish Sign Language’ or VGT). The Flemish Deaf Community consists of about 5000–6000 people (Loots et al., 2003).

History

At the end of the 1970s, Fevlado decided

to develop and promote a signed system called ‘*Nederlands met Gebaren*’ (‘Dutch with Signs’) or NmG. It was assumed that NmG could function as a bridge between sign language users and speakers of Dutch. From 1981 a number of initiatives were taken to promote the use of NmG, e.g. the organisation of the so-called ‘*vrije gebarencursussen*’ (‘free communication courses’) for hearing people and the founding of an ‘interpreters for the deaf training programme’ to train interpreters to work between Dutch and NmG. (Boonen, Van Herreweghe, & Vermeerbergen, 2004). Most of the teachers teaching NmG were deaf, and they had had no training.

In the early 1990s, Fevlado established a (small-scale) teacher training programme and in 1993, as part of a European Horizon project 16 young deaf teachers attended courses, mainly on language teaching methodology and didactics. Within the framework of this programme the participants travelled to the Centre for Deaf Studies in Bristol where Clark Denmark offered an intensive course in Sign Language Teaching Methods. In part due to his charismatic influence, some of the participants started to doubt the usefulness of NmG and wanted to change

their own teaching towards Flemish Sign Language. This, together with some other developments (see Boonen, Van Herreweghe, & Vermeerbergen, 2004), led to Fevlado officially rejecting the use of *'Nederlands met Gebaren'* in favour of Flemish Sign Language. Around 1996, both within the *'vrije gebarencursussen'* and interpreter training, classes in NmG were replaced by classes in Flemish Sign Language (VGT). This was not easy, as research on Flemish Sign Language grammar was still in its infancy and information on the linguistics of VGT was very scarce.

Courses

Flemish Sign Language courses for hearing adults (who want to learn VGT as L2) are offered by Fevlado-Diversus (level 1 and 2; each level consisting of 20 classes of 2 hours each) and several CVOs ('centres for continuing education'). We know of at least seven CVOs where VGT classes are offered. Some deaf schools also offer VGT courses for hearing parents and other family members of their deaf students. However, this is very much 'ad hoc' and limited.

VGT is also taught as part of the two part-time training programmes for sign language interpreters organized by the CVO Crescendo in Mechelen and the CVO

VSPW in Ghent.

Ghent University offers an elective course 'Introduction to Flemish Sign Language' (4 ECTS) and at the University Language Centre of the same university there also is a VGT course (30 hours).

At KU Leuven Campus Antwerp, the only Flemish academic training for sign language interpreters is organized. At this university, Flemish Sign Language is integrated in the Bachelor of Applied Language Studies Programme (3 year-programme), the Master in Interpreting (1 year) and there also is a specific part-time one year Postgraduate in VGT Interpreting.

Training of SL teachers

Today, more than 20 years after the start of teaching Flemish Sign Language as an L2 to hearing people, there still is no specific formal training for teachers of Flemish Sign Language.

Ever since it was decided to teach Flemish Sign Language instead of *'Nederlands met Gebaren'*, Fevlado has taken initiatives to support and train its own teachers. In 1996 for example, a course on the grammar of Flemish Sign Language was organized for deaf teachers. Today, Fevlado offers teachers who start teaching Flemish Sign Language level 1 a 12– half-days training and teachers who begin to

teach VGT level 2 a six half-days training, mainly concentrating on the grammar of VGT, on didactics and on the content of the course materials.

In the past, two deaf native signers trained to become what used to be called a *'regent'* (i.e. a teacher in year 1 to 4 of secondary education) and one of their three subjects was Flemish Sign Language. There are a few other deaf teachers who hold a degree related to education, e.g. they trained to become a nursery school teacher or primary school teacher. Some other deaf teachers (again very few) obtained a so-called *getuigschrift pedagogische bekwaamheid* ('certificate of pedagogical competence').

Some hearing teachers combine a sign language interpreting training with a (general) teachers training (*'specifieke lerarenopleiding'*) and as such they may be seen as trained/qualified to teach Flemish Sign Language but as said, there is no specific training for those who want to become professional teachers of Flemish Sign Language.

Curricula, learning materials, CEFR

The first materials to teach Flemish Sign Language were developed by Fevlado at the end of the 1990s. This was done in

collaboration with a linguist studying the grammar of Flemish Sign Language. Since then, Fevlado has regularly updated and complemented its materials, collaborating e.g. with the Vlaams GebarentaalCentrum ('Flemish Sign Language Centre') and/or the CVO VSPW in Ghent.

Most other programmes/individual teachers develop their own materials, although there also is (mostly informal) collaboration and exchange of materials.

The CEFR certainly is a source of inspiration for some of the teachers (e.g. at KU Leuven) but it is not formally/structurally implemented.

Number of SL-teachers

The total number of VGT teachers is estimated at 30 to 35 people.

This year (2016-2017) some 18 deaf signers teach the Fevlado-Diversus courses. The number of teachers teaching Flemish Sign Language in a centre for continuing education (CVO) is estimated at 12 to 15, some deaf, some hearing. At KU Leuven, there are two (deaf) teachers of Flemish Sign Language. The two part-time interpreter training programmes currently employ 2 deaf VGT teachers each. The number of people teaching VGT for parents or staff members at deaf schools is unknown. Some

teachers are affiliated with more than one programme/initiative.

There is no association of Flemish Sign Language teachers. However, there is a working group consisting of 4 deaf teachers (2 working for Fevlado-Diversus, 2 affiliated with KU Leuven, Campus Antwerpen). So far, the group has organized two workshops for deaf Flemish Sign Language teachers (one in 2014 and one in 2016).

Sign language research

Research on the grammar of Flemish Sign Language started around 1990. The first books reporting on research results were published in the second half of the 1990s (Vermeerbergen, 1997 and Van Herreweghe 1995). In 1999 the Vlaams GebarentaalCentrum published a “signing book”, i.e. two video-cassettes with information on the grammar of VGT explained in VGT. The first (online) dictionary was published in 2004. It is currently being expanded by the Vlaams GebarentaalCentrum.

Flemish Sign Language clearly is one of the un(der)documented signed languages, mainly because there are very few active researchers. Today, research activities are situated at KU Leuven, Campus Antwerp; at Ghent University and the Vlaams GebarentaalCentrum

(lexicographical research).

Sign language legislation

On April 26th 2006, the Flemish Parliament unanimously approved a decree recognizing VGT as the language of the linguistic-cultural minority group of deaf people and Flemish Sign Language users in Flanders. The decree further regulated the establishment of an advisory committee for VGT, and funding mechanisms for projects related to VGT.

An important question

Especially because there is no specific training for teachers of Flemish Sign Language, the question of what is the ‘ideal’ profile of the VGT teacher is a complex one. One of the questions is whether or not preference should be given to deaf teachers.

Around 2010 more and more CVOs started offering Flemish Sign Language courses. They sometimes employed hearing teachers, most often sign language interpreters who only recently learned Flemish Sign Language as an L2 themselves. In March 2012, out of concern about the quality of VGT-teaching Fevlado and the Vlaams GebarentaalCentrum wrote an advice arguing against hearing late-learners of VGT teaching Flemish Sign Language and in favor of deaf teachers.

Currently, the *Adviescommissie Vlaamse Gebarentaal* ('advisory committee for VGT', www.adviesvgt.be) is working on its own advice, again out of concern about the quality of Flemish Sign Language courses. This advice is not yet finalized but it seems that the issue of whether or not VGT should be taught by deaf teachers is not seen as all that important. Instead, the advice follows De Weerd, Salonen and Liikamaa (2016) in stating that a sign language teacher needs:

- 1) excellent sign language proficiency,
- 2) linguistic knowledge,
- 3) pedagogical knowledge and
- 4) frequent contact with the sign language community.

References:

<https://www.signteach.eu/index.php/book/references>







Interview with Myriam Vermeerbergen

Prof. dr. Myriam Vermeerbergen is a sign linguist and a sign language interpreter trainer at KU Leuven, Faculty of Arts, Antwerp (Belgium).

Myriam Vermeerbergen is the chair of the Flemish Sign Language group and coordinator of the Master in Interpreting program of the KU Leuven in Antwerp.

In the early 1990s Myriam pioneered linguistic research on Flemish Sign Language (VGT) and founded the very first academic Flemish Sign Language course. She is co-founder and former president of the Vlaams GebarentaalCentrum (Flemish Sign Language Centre), recognised by the government as the centre of expertise for Flemish Sign Language. Between 2008 and 2016, she was also a member of the Advisory Board on Flemish Sign Language.

What, in your opinion, are the strengths/weaknesses of the current system in your country?

The most significant problem is the lack of a specific training program for Flemish Sign Language teachers. Most of the teachers have had no or very little training. Today the people who in theory are best trained to teach Flemish Sign Language, are those who learned/studied

Flemish Sign Language in another training course or program (e.g. sign language interpreter training) and additionally obtained some sort of teacher's degree, but not one specifically for Flemish Sign Language. I don't mean to say that those people aren't good teachers, but their training is not specific enough. Also, most of these people are hearing late-learners of Flemish Sign Language.

Can you give us examples of 'best practice' in your country?

This is a difficult one. I am very happy to see that most teachers and most institutions offering Flemish Sign Language teaching realise that Flemish Sign Language teachers need a proper and specific training program. Also, some teachers really put in a lot of effort to try and get as much training and information as possible. I am pleased, and proud, to say that my colleagues at KU Leuven are among these highly motivated professionals.

I also very much like the collaboration between different initiatives, institutions and organisations, e.g. when developing teaching materials and exchanging ideas.

And last but not least, we now have the Corpus Vlaamse Gebarentaal, which can be used both for research and for teaching.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers, in your country?

There is no accreditation of sign language teachers in Flanders.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in your country? Are curricula based on the CEFR?

The first materials that were developed were aimed at teaching *Nederlands met Gebaren* (Signed Dutch) and not Flemish Sign Language (VGT).

In 1992-1993, whilst working on my PhD, I developed and delivered an elective Flemish Sign Language course at the Vrije Universiteit Brussel (VUB) (24 hours/year) which was taught by a deaf friend. The materials we created for this course were inspired by my experiences teaching Dutch as a foreign language.

Towards the end of the 1990s, the status of Flemish Sign Language was changing and NmG courses were being transformed into VGT courses. This was very difficult in the beginning, as there were very few materials to teach VGT. Fevlado, the Flemish Deaf Association, took the initiative to develop a first set of materials and asked me to coordinate that task,

seeing that I had created materials for our own course at the VUB.

Subsequent teaching materials were often developed as a collaborative effort, involving e.g. the Vlaams Gebarentaal-Centrum, Fevlado (and Fevlado-Diversus), and the CVO (centre for continuing education) VSPW in Ghent.

With regard to the CEFR, I assume you could say that some aspects of the framework influenced the development of curricula but I wouldn't say that most curricula are "CEFR-based".

What, in your opinion, is the way forward for sign language teaching & the training of sign language teachers in your country, and/or in Europe?

Without any doubt: high quality training for sign language teachers. And this training should be fully accessible for deaf students.

I would like to see a 'Flemish Sign Language course' as an optional subject for everyone in secondary education, or maybe even an introduction to Flemish Sign Language for all primary school kids. I think that would be nice and it might lead to young people wanting to do something more with what they've already learned.

Do you have any recommendations that you want to share with us?

The grammar of Flemish Sign Language still is under-documented and under-described. As such, it is very important that the teaching “keeps up works”, so to speak. What I mean is that whenever new research results on the linguistics of VGT are available, these should immediately be incorporated in Flemish Sign Language teaching (materials). And because of this, it is even more important that there is a close collaboration between researchers, those who provide teacher training, and those who do the actual teaching.

Research should inform teaching but it is also the case that teaching may “feed” research, i.e. questions that come up when teaching the language, may be and should be addressed by sign language linguists.

Date of the Interview: May 2017

On the [SignTeach website](#): a video of a conversation between Myriam Vermeerbergen and her colleague Mieke Van Herreweghe on these and other topics related to Flemish Sign Language teaching.



Interview with Hilde Nyffels

Fevlado-Diversus; VSPW

Hilde Nyffels has a wide experience in teaching. She started teaching

Nederlands met Gebaren ('Signed Dutch') in 1994, but for over 20 years now, she has been teaching Flemish Sign Language (Vlaamse Gebarentaal or VGT). Currently, she combines two jobs: she works for Fevlado-Diversus (the Flemish Deaf Association) where she is responsible (among other things) for training and supporting deaf Flemish Sign Language teachers and for the development of teaching materials. She also works for the VSPW (a CVO, i.e. a centre for continuing education), where she teaches Flemish Sign Language courses. Hilde has always strongly invested in her own continuing education and professional development – and continues to do so.

What, in your opinion, are the strengths / weaknesses of the current system in your country?

In Flanders, there are different options for (hearing) adults who want to learn Flemish Sign Language. There are the more extensive, formal courses, for example those organised at centres for

continuing education, where students are required to take an exam at the end of each course. But there also exist more informal, smaller-scale courses, organised by Fevlado-Diversus. These are open to anyone who is interested in wanting to learn (about) Flemish Sign Language and Deaf culture and there are no exams or tests. I feel it is really good to have different types of courses, different opportunities. Some people simply want an introduction to Flemish Sign Language and Deaf culture, nothing too extensive or formal.

What is lacking in Flanders are tailor-made courses and training: Flemish Sign Language courses targeting specific groups, such as healthcare professionals (e.g. nurses, geriatric assistants ...), civil servants (receptionists, administrative clerks - people who often get in touch with the public, police officers too) ... In my opinion such courses could be organised by centres for continuing education (CVOs).

Unfortunately, in Flanders there is no recognised training program for Flemish Sign Language teachers. Consequently, VGT teachers are not qualified and I really feel that is a significant shortcoming in Flanders.

What I consider to be an additional strength is that we really try hard to engage deaf signers to teach Flemish Sign Language, in spite of the fact that they have no qualifications.

Can you give us examples of 'best practice' in your country?

Not really, but as I said, I very much like the fact that Flemish Sign Language is mostly taught by deaf (native) signers.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers, in your country?

As I mentioned earlier, there is no specific training program for sign language teachers in Flanders, therefore, accreditation is not possible.

Some teachers (especially those teaching at a CVO) do hold some certification. They obtained for example a *getuigschrift pedagogische bekwaamheid* ('a certificate of pedagogical competence'). They attended such training to gain more insight into didactics.

Others took courses in sign language linguistics and/or the grammar of VGT in order to learn more about VGT as a language. There are also a few deaf teachers who trained to become nursery school teachers or primary school teachers. But the majority of the Flemish Sign Language teachers do not have a certificate

or degree related to teaching.

Those teaching for Fevlado-Diversus receive a basic training on the grammar of VGT and didactics. On completion of the training, they get a certificate as proof of attendance.

I myself enrolled in a teacher training program at a centre for continuing education and obtained the 'certificate of pedagogical competence'. I also took courses in sign language linguistics and the linguistics of Flemish Sign Language at KU Leuven in Antwerp. All that was very enriching, yet I still feel something is missing, something at a higher level.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in your country? Are curricula based on the CEFR?

At the moment we do not work with the CEFR at the CVO where I am employed. However, several teachers went abroad (e.g. to attend conferences such as Lesico ...) and we realise it would be good to de-



velop course materials based on the CEFR. We should try and integrate the CEFR into the existing curriculum. This is not straightforward, because it involves a lot of work and the team doesn't really have the time to meet up on a regular basis. Most teachers do not work at the CVO full-time. They combine a part-time position as a teacher with another job, which makes it hard to find opportunities for them to get together.

What, in your opinion, is the way forward for sign language teaching & the training of sign language teachers in your country, and/or in Europe?

1. In Flanders, there are a number of university colleges and universities that provide teacher training programs. Students can decide what kind of teacher they would like to become, e.g. a Dutch and English teacher. Depending on their qualification, a teacher is allowed to teach in a primary school, secondary school or in tertiary education. The programs that exist today do not include opportunities for Flemish Sign Language teachers.

It would be good if there would be at least one university college or university that would offer a program for VGT teachers, in accordance with the program for Dutch teachers. There should be a program at BA level and one at MA lev-

el. Students should be offered exchange programs in order to teach or to gain experience abroad and to exchange ideas.

It is also important that teacher's training programs (at colleges, universities) do not only provide courses on didactics and VGT, but also introduce students to different groups within the Deaf community, such as senior citizens, deaf-blind people, etc. For those who would like to really focus on one particular target group, specific modules should be organised. This should also be included in interpreter training programs.

2. When it comes to offering Flemish Sign Language courses for adult learners, this is my suggestion:

A *vrije gebarencursus* (or 'open sign language course') for everyone who is interested in learning about VGT as a language and about Deaf culture, and for family members (e.g. aunts, uncles, etc.) of deaf children, or senior citizens ... This type of (informal) course can be organised at a centre for continuing education (CVO) and also by Fevlado-Diversus. However, the teachers should be trained at a higher level. They must have knowledge of didactics, VGT and Deaf culture. Teachers must therefore have a bachelor's degree or a specific degree for teaching VGT in adult education.

A (more formal) course at a higher level should be taught at a CVO or at university colleges. The target audience of these courses would be hearing people who might come into contact with deaf people, e.g. caregivers, civil servants, parents, deafened people who would like to learn VGT ... These courses should be taught only by teachers who hold a BA or MA degree, i.e. (highly) qualified VGT-teachers.

A sign language interpreter's training program has to be organised at a university (MA-level) and not at a centre for continuing education. CVOs should instead focus on organising more customised VGT courses, e.g. aimed at people working in health care (see also above). Professionals working in the social domain are qualified within their own field of expertise, but lack proper communication skills with deaf or deaf-blind people. In order to be allowed to teach Flemish Sign Language at a university level, teachers need to have obtained a MA degree.

3. There is a need for a centrally developed curriculum or rather curricula for different levels (as I mentioned earlier) and different target groups, based on the CEFR. Subsequently, course materials need to be developed for these different levels and groups. It would be ideal if an external body could take care of this in

order to ensure that teaching levels are standardised across Flanders. This is not the case today, as different institutions interpret the curricula in different ways.

Do you have any recommendations that you want to share with us?

Perhaps in the future there could be one Master program for European deaf teachers. This could be taught in EuSL, like ASL is used in the United States of America. This is my dream for Europe.

Date of the Interview: May 2017

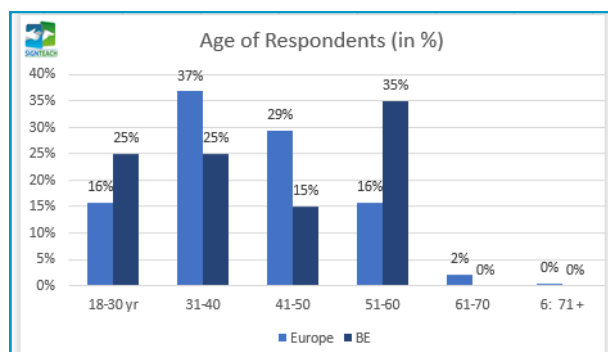
On the [SignTeach website](#): video of a conversation between Hilde Nyffels and Geert Verstraete on these and other topics related to Flemish Sign Language teaching.

Results of the SignTeach Survey: Belgium

Number of respondents

21 respondents from Belgium.

Age of the respondents



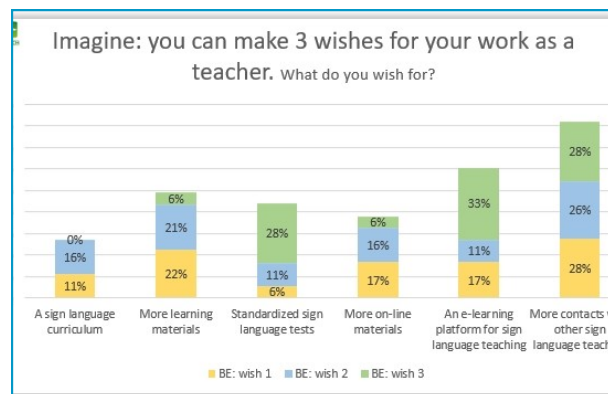
Compared to all sign language teachers who completed the Survey, the respondents from Belgium are relative old: 50% are 41 years or older; 35% are 51 years or older.

Have you had any special training for teaching sign language?



Only 45% of the respondents from Belgium (orange) have had any special training, compared to 82% for all respondents (blue). We did not ask any details about the training; this can vary from a single workshop, to a 4 year academic training programme.

Imagine: you can make three wishes for your work as a teacher. What do you wish for?



The most important wish for the sign language teachers from Belgium: more contacts with other sign language teachers. Many also want an e-learning platform for sign language teaching.

Open question: advice, good examples?

“Each country should have an organisation for sign language teachers.”

“I think it is very positive that there is now a website for sign language teachers. We can learn a lot from it, and we can use it to share experiences.”

Open question: barriers?

“Work by deaf teachers is often not taken seriously. “

“A barrier is that the students are difficult to understand, and also that they need to hear a voice when they don't understand me or my lessons.”

More results can be found on the [SignTeach website](#).

Country Report

5.2 Czech Republic



5.2 Czech Republic

Radka Nováková & Vladimír Šimon, Pevnost, Prague (CZ)

General background

Czech Sign Language (CzSL or in Czech: ČZJ) has been used for centuries but was recognized as a language in 1998.

“Czech linguistics started focusing on languages and communication of the deaf only in mid-1990. Deafness was (in the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic and in the subsequent Czechoslovak Federal Republic) in the hands of medicine, special pedagogy and logopaedia.

Even in the Czech Republic (established in 1993), deafness was often approached (and, sadly, sometimes is even today) as a deficiency, a defect which may be cured, remedied, removed. The official attitude of the Communist regime, prior to 1989, was strictly uniform and dominated by what has been called the "demutisation" of the deaf, that is, the endeavour to teach the deaf to talk and to lip-read (if not hear) at the very least.

If the opinion that human beings can develop a complex system of communication not based on sound existed at all, it was strictly a minority belief before 1989.

In the early 1990s, the only institution opening new approaches towards deafness and towards the deaf as a linguistic and cultural minority (and thus initiating the interest of linguistics) was the Federace rodičů a přátel sluchově pos (žených (Federation of Parents and Friends of the Hearing-Impaired) and its (now defunct) counterpart, the Institut pro neslyšících (Institute for the Deaf).” (Richterová, Macurová and Nováková 2016: 164-165).

Sign language research



The first papers on communication of the Czech Deaf was published in 1994 by prof. Alena Macurová (see photo) as the first Czech linguist. She focused her efforts on fathoming the structure and functioning of the CzSL, compared it with other national sign languages etc.

In 1998 the Deaf Studies program was launched in a three-year Bachelor's Degree form and a five-year Master's Degree form in combination with the Czech Language and Literature, with the Institute of Czech Language and Theory of Communication standing guarantee at the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague.

In 2004 a two-year follow-up Master's Degree program was launched (not in combination with Czech Language and Literature).

In 2013 (November 1st) the Institute of Deaf Studies was established (splitting off from the Institute of Czech Language and Theory of Communication). It is the only department pursuing the linguistics of sign languages and the Deaf Studies in the Czech Republic.

Courses

CzSL courses for L2 hearing people are offered by several organisations for the deaf (also by some hearing organisations). These courses are taught not only by deaf teachers, but also by hearing teachers (mostly CODA, Children of Deaf Adults).

Unfortunately, the quality of courses in our country varies greatly. The courses are often presented as Czech Sign Language courses, but in reality, Signed



Czech is being taught.

Pevnost – the Czech Centre of Sign Language ([Pevnost](#)) was founded in 2000 and is lead by deaf people themselves.

Pevnost provides high quality sign language courses not only for hearing people (7 levels; each level consisting of 35 classes of 2 hours each), but also for sign language interpreters and for other target groups (such as hearing parents of deaf children, police officers, doctors etc.)

The Institute of Deaf Studies, Charles University in Prague teaches CzSL as academic training for students who want to become a sign language interpreter or a teacher in a school for the Deaf.

Some universities in the Czech Republic also offer an elective CzSL course for their students (mostly Faculty of pedagogy).

Training of sign language teachers

There is no specific formal program for



teaching sign language at university level in the Czech Republic.

However, the Institute of Deaf Studies, Faculty of Arts, Charles University, teaches the Linguistics of Sign Languages (primarily Czech Sign Language), and the training and education of the Deaf. So, deaf students may be seen as trained/qualified to teach CzSL.

Some organisations offer training for their teachers of CzSL. Over ten years ago, Pevnost organized several training courses for deaf teachers of CzSL. After passing the exam, the deaf teachers received only a certificate.

In 2012, the Institute of Deaf Studies provided a one-year training course for 11 deaf sign language users who wanted to become sign language teachers, in a Life-long Learning Programme.

Curricula, learning materials, CEFR

Most organisations/individual teachers develop their own materials for teaching sign language. Unfortunately, there is no collaboration and exchange of materials.

There is no CEFR for Czech Sign Language therefore these materials are not adaptation to the CEFR.

Number of sign language teachers

There is no official association of CzSL teachers which has some sort of registration. We estimate that the total number of CzSL teachers is between 40 to 60 people.

The first meeting of deaf teachers and CzSL teachers organized by Pevnost in 2016 was attended by only 42 CzSL teachers from across the Czech Republic (see photo).

However, there are more teachers who

are employed by the schools for the Deaf, some by universities, some by organisations for the Deaf while others are self-employed.

At the second meeting of Deaf Teachers and Sign Language Teachers (April 2017) it was decided to establish an association; a working group was elected to realise this.

Sign language dictionaries

There are only two general sign language dictionaries in the Czech Republic. The first dictionary *Slovník znakové řeči* was published in 1988, in the former Czechoslovak Socialist Republic by Gabrielová, Paur and Zeman. It was known as the “blue book”. The second two dictionaries called *Všeobecný slovník českého znakového jazyka A-N* and *Všeobecný slovník českého znakového jazyka O-Ž* were published in 2002 by Potměšil.



Unfortunately, the Czech Sign Language dictionaries were not developed on the basis of a corpus of Czech Sign Language.

Sign language legislation

Act on 'Sign System' (*Zákon o znakové řeči*) was ratified on 11th of June 1998, after a lot of hard work. The act was approved as a symbolic recognition of the Czech Sign Language as the primary form of communication of the deaf in the Czech Republic.

However there was a problem with the old term “**znaková řeč**” (sometimes translated also as “Sign Speech” or “Sign System”), which includes both Czech Sign Language and Sign Supported Czech (Signed Czech).

The **Act on the Communication Systems of Deaf and Deafblind persons** (*novela: Zákon o komunikačních systémech neslyšících a hluchoslepých osob*) was adopted by Parliament (June 2008) and came into force in October 2008. The old term “znaková řeč” was removed. Czech Sign Language and communication systems based on the Czech language are now clearly distinguished.

References:

<https://www.signteach.eu/index.php/book/references>





Interview with Marie Basovníková

Deaf teacher of Czech Sign Language at a secondary school for the Deaf. Leader for developing the methodological material and methodical support for the subject of the Czech Sign Language at primary schools for the Deaf. Poet and performer/artist of Czech Sign Language.

What, in your opinion, are the strengths/weaknesses of the current system in your country?

For the strengths in our country, there are the positive views on Czech Sign Language and on Deaf people as members of a linguistic cultural minority.

Until 2000, the only courses that were taught were Signed Czech, all by hearing teachers (mostly children of deaf parents). Now I see that almost all teachers are Deaf, teaching Czech Sign Language.

On the other hand, there are no systems for the standardisation of the curriculum, or to monitor the quality of teaching sign language.

Can you give us examples of ‘best practice’ in your country?

One good example is that a few years ago there was the one-year training course for Deaf people who wanted to become sign language teachers, as part of the Lifelong Learning Programme by the Institute of Deaf Studies at Charles

University. I like it because it was as a neutral and independent place where all Deaf people in the Czech Republic can get a proper training course, rather than in a “private” organisation.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers, in your country? Is the system as accessible deaf teachers, as for hearing teachers?

We do not have any formal accreditation of sign language teachers in our country, not even as an academic degree, that is specifically for the training sign language teachers.

There are some the short-term “informal” training course provided by organisations themselves for their potential candidates, who after passing an exam can work for this organisation.

In my opinion, this does not work well and is more like an internal training that the organisation has set up for its own business. A formal and “open” training programme for all – this is still missing in the Czech Republic.

As to the second question about hearing teachers – in our country there are only a few hearing teachers who teach Czech Sign Language. I support them only if they work together with Deaf teachers in the advanced courses of CzSL for sign language interpreters. However, general Czech Sign Language should be taught by Deaf native signers.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in your country? Are curricula based on the CEFR?

We do not have any CEFR for Czech Sign Language. Each organisation develops its own curriculum based on their teaching methodology and also based on the requirements from the Ministry for Education/Social Affairs that organises the accreditation courses. Unfortunately, their requirements are mostly inadequate and inconvenient. I see two very big problems.

First, there are major differences in the levels of teaching sign language, between organisations.

Second, the development of the curriculum is focused more on teaching sign language to hearing adults, not to teaching it to deaf/hard of hearing students at the School for the Deaf. In my case, I work as a teacher of Czech Sign Language for deaf and hard of hearing students – I

have to struggle with that. Because I do not know what and how to teach properly. It is a big challenge for me.

What, in your opinion, is the way forward for sign language teaching & the training of sign language teachers in your country, and/or in Europe?

My biggest wish is to develop and to approve a CEFR for Czech Sign Language as soon as possible. It is a key to all systems – it would give us a tool for organisations to keep the proper level of teaching sign language.

The second question, the way forward for good quality sign language teaching, is to enable more sign language teachers to participate in the Lifelong Learning training programme for sign language teachers.

Date of the Interview: May 2017



Interview with Radka Nováková

Deaf, native signer of Czech Sign Language.

Assistant Professor, the Institute of Deaf Studies, the Faculty of Arts of Charles University in Prague. Chief operating officer of Pevnost – the Czech Centre of Sign Language in Prague. Editor of the News in Czech Sign Language, Czech Television.

What, in your opinion, are the strengths/weaknesses of the current system in your country?

In my opinion, there are more weaknesses than strengths in the Czech Republic. An example of a weakness: there is no standardised system for teaching sign language or the training of sign language teachers. Organisations providing CzSL courses and also freelance sign language teachers often see each other as competitors, fighting for the same students or jobs.

The strengths, on the other hand: I see that Czech deaf people are more self-confident; they are more aware of the value of their sign language. They speak out that the CzSL courses should be led by deaf native signers.

Can you give us examples of ‘best practice’ in your country?

I can give you two examples. First, Pevnost organised the First international Conference of Sign Language Teachers in history – LESICO in 2013, in Prague. The LESICO Conference was a place where

professionals could exchange not only their teaching experiences, but also news from the academic field of research on sign languages and the teaching of sign languages and finally, it was a unique opportunity to make new contacts in this field. At the end of the conference, there were two more important events. First, the conference participants decided that a LESICO conference with the same name will be held every two years.

Secondly, the proposal was approved to set up a professional organisation: the [European Network of Sign Language Teachers](#) (ENSLT) that would unite deaf sign language teachers together in its goal, as it is in Europe.

Second, the Institute of Deaf Studies is an associate partner in two European projects: *Sign languages and the Common European Framework of References for Languages. Descriptors and approaches to assessment* ([ProSign](#)) carried out in the ECML’s 2012–2015 programme, and *Promoting Excellence in Sign language instruction* ([ProSign2](#)) carried out

in the ECML's 2016–2019 programme. The Institute translated the brochure *Sign Languages and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages Common Reference Level Descriptors* into Czech Language.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers, in your country? Is the system as accessible Deaf teachers, as for hearing teachers?

There is no regular BA or MA programme for sign language teachers in the Czech Republic. Deaf students who graduate from the Institute of Deaf Studies, are able to become sign language teachers. But this does not work well because there are no clear qualifications for teachers of different target groups. Most of the teachers know how to teach hearing adults, but they do not know how to teach deaf children at school etc.

There are informal short-term training courses for sign language teachers, organized by many organisations. Unfortunately, we don't have a central registration system of qualified teachers; there is no quality control of independent sign language teachers. Anyone who wants, can teach sign language in the Czech Republic.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in your country? Are curricula based on the CEFR?

I can tell you about one project related to

the subject of Czech Sign Language at kindergarten, primary and secondary schools for the Deaf. The National Institute for Education (NÚV) run directly by the Ministry of Education Youth and Sports in cooperation with deaf teachers (lead by Marie Basovnicková) has started to develop methodological materials and methodical support for deaf teachers of Czech Sign Language. This project will run from January 2017 to December 2021.

What, in your opinion, is the way forward for sign language teaching & the training of sign language teachers in your country, and/or in Europe?

In my opinion, to begin to improve the quality of sign language teachers, we need to do many things in our country:

- Establish a professional association of CzSL teachers;
- Develop a CEFR for CzSL;
- Cooperate with [ENSLT](#);
- Exchange information and share experiences with sign language teachers, both nationally and internationally,
- Encourage sign language teachers to participate in various seminars and training workshops in Europe or to study available open educational resources for Sign Language Teachers (for example: www.signteach.eu).

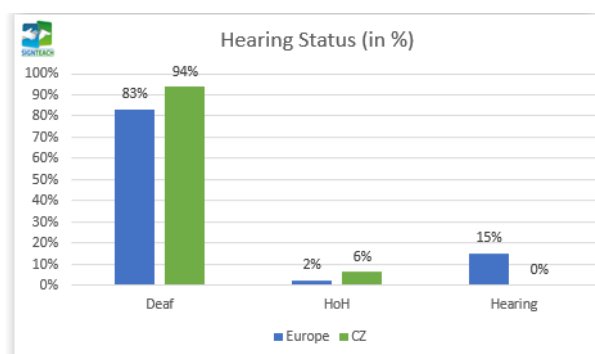
Date of the Interview: May 2017

Results SignTeach Survey: Czech Republic

Number of respondents

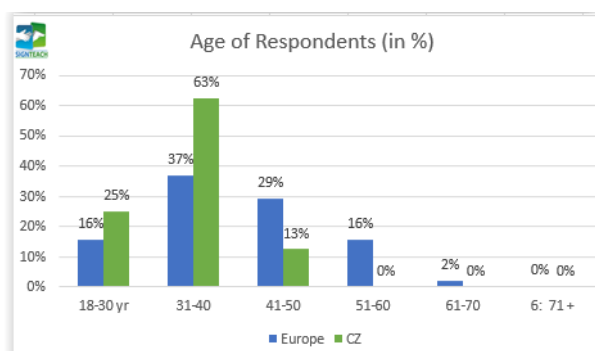
16 respondents.

Hearing Status



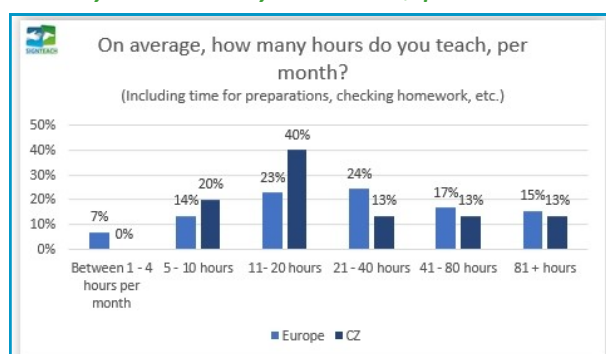
Most of the Czech respondents are deaf (green), 6% are hard of hearing, None of the respondents is hearing.

Age groups



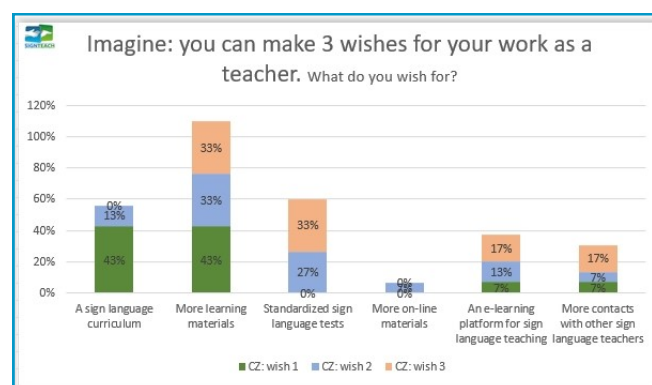
Most of the Czech respondents are between 31-40 years of age, relatively young compared to their EU colleagues..

How many hours do you teach, per month?



60% of the Czech respondents teach less than 21 hours per month.

Imagine: you can make 3 wishes for your work as a teacher. What do you wish for?



Almost all respondents wish for more learning materials. Many also wish for a sign language curriculum.

Open question: Good advice?

“I think that it is good to attend the conferences, e.g. LESICO conference, and lectures connected to sign language teaching or didactics, and to study more. Perhaps it is also good to share experiences, opinions and examples on websites not only from my country, but also from Europe.”

Open question: Barriers?

“No co-operation with lecturers from other cities; everyone is doing it his way. Here in the Czech Republic there is not a unified system of signs.”

More results can be found on the [SignTeach website](#).

Country Report

5.3 Germany



5.3 Germany

Sabine Fries, Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal FH, Magdeburg (DE)

Historical background

Long before there was reliable knowledge about DGS and sign language research in Germany, signing courses (“Gebärdenkurse“) existed. Until the end of the 1980s, hearing participants of such courses learned a form of “Signed German”, now referred to as “Lautsprachbegleitendes Gebärden” (LBG, signs accompanying speech), that is, they learned how to speak and more or less consistently use manual signs at the same time.

LBG: “Signed German”

Teachers of these courses were often hearing children of deaf parents. A long-time teacher of such classes was Manfred Wloka, teacher and later headmaster of the Deaf School in what was then West-Berlin. As the son of deaf parents he had grown up with sign language. Looking back, he remembers the beginnings of his activities:

“The impetus for my first sign language course in the autumn of 1976 came from parents of deaf children who kept saying over and over again: “We are completely helpless, we stand outside the community of deaf people, and when our children

bring home friends, we understand nothing. We would like to learn how to sign.” (Wloka 2001: 227 – our translation).

Apart from teachers of the deaf and hearing children of deaf parents, most of whom also worked as interpreters at the time, there were a few deaf people with good oral skills who also taught such “Gebärdenkurse”.

Completing an LBG course went some way towards enabling hearing learners to communicate more or less successfully with deaf people, provided that the content of the conversation did not go beyond the scope of everyday subjects.

However, Signed German did not allow for relaxed and fluent communication, in particular because hearing learners could not follow the silent and spontaneous communication that is usual among deaf people.

The Blue Book

In terms of teaching materials, signing classes almost exclusively relied on the few collections of signs available at the time, such as the dictionary of signs generally known as the “Blue Book”, a collection of signs published in 1977 by teach-

ers of the deaf Hellmuth Starcke und Günter Maisch. Their volume was widely used in the years after its publication, until it came to be increasingly criticized for the inclusion of many “international” signs alien to the German Deaf community and eventually replaced.

Grass-root

By the end of the 1980s, more and more deaf sign language teachers became active. The development was actively supported by the “Bundesarbeits-gemeinschaft für Gebärdenkursleiter (BAG)”, an association of sign language teachers founded in 1987.

This grass-root movement was highly motivated by the growing awareness of sign languages as true languages spreading all through Europe by this time¹. Deaf people actively involved in this empowerment wave had a lasting influence on the character of "Gebärdenkurse".

DGS: Deutsche Gebärdensprache

Instead of earlier LBG courses, which were designed to teach hearing people how to accompany their spoken language by manual signs in order to communicate with or, rather, talk to deaf people, deaf teachers now addressed

their courses to hearing participants as learners of a foreign language. Exercises in nonverbal communication, a visually-oriented curriculum focusing on sign language grammar, facial expressions, manual parameters, and spatial dimensions became central.



Mary Philips advising the first DGS-teachers in Berlin

Sign language units such as classifiers, verb modifiers, and locations were the

For a personal account of these developments by one the important Deaf activists of the time see Gertrud Mally on “The long road to self-confidence of the Deaf in Germany”, in Renate Fischer and Harlan Lane, *Looking Back: A Reader on the History of Deaf Communities and their Sign Languages* (Hamburg: Signum, 1993), pp. 177–198.

new focus of attention. These new courses came to be a great attraction to hearing learners. In the learners' minds, the awareness grew that they were facing a fascinating language of its own that provided access to a vibrant culture, not just a set of manual cues to be used as an aid to facilitate communication with a group of disabled people.

Deaf sign language teachers

However, the Deaf community was not adequately prepared for the great interest hearing people took in learning this new language. The growing demand for DGS courses raised many questions and at times caused considerable problems.

As in the 1970s in the USA, sign language courses in Germany were increasingly taught by Deaf people who were happy to teach and often embraced this as a challenge and a vocation, but often they did not know enough about the language they were supposed to teach nor did they have a background in teaching or even learning foreign languages.

Research in sign languages and especially DGS had only just begun, the lexicon and grammar of DGS were only inadequately documented at the time.



Robinson and Freitag teaching DGS in a German TV program.

Pioneering sign language teachers did not have access to teaching concepts and teaching materials. The BAG was on the lookout for training materials and invited Deaf lecturers such as Gilbert C. Eastman (USA), Frances Elton (UK), Christa Ekholm (Sweden) or Margarita Navas Sánchez (Spain) to Germany in order to gain insights into international work done by sign language instructors.

Important input also came from the deaf lecturers working at the “Zentrum für Deutsche Gebärdensprache” (Hamburg University), who reported about their experiences as university lecturers in work-

shops and gave important advice for teaching nonverbal communication and DGS.

Training of sign language teachers

Today, sign language teaching is offered in all major German cities. The number of free-lance sign language teachers is difficult to estimate, since only a small proportion of them is organized in BDG, the professional association of the teachers for sign language (<http://www.bdg-gebaerdensprache.de>).

The BDG sees itself as representing the interests of all full-time and free-lance sign language teachers in Germany. At the heart of the association's work is the exchange of experiences in teaching sign language teaching, mainly offered to adult hearing L2 learners.

In recent years, however, DGS teaching methods have become increasingly important as part of early childhood intervention for hearing-impaired children and in the context of establishing sign language as a subject in deaf schools.

In 2004, the BDG developed an occupational profile, and in 2014 a special code of practice was set up to ensure "the reputation of the profession and safeguard the interests of the Deaf Community". The code obligates the BDG's members to participate regularly in continuing ed-

ucation and advanced training, and it encourages its members to acquire a qualifying degree, as it is offered in the form of a state examination by the Bavarian Institute for the Promotion of Communication for People with Hearing Impairment (<http://www.giby.de>) and by the Hessian Teachers' Academy (*Hessische Lehrkräfteakademie*). However, as yet, there exists no basic professional training for sign language teachers in Germany. Sign language teachers seeking professional qualification depend on isolated further training measures or part-time courses, as they are currently offered at the University of Hamburg and by the Bavarian Institute.

Teaching concepts and materials

The development towards a new breed of deaf sign language instructors who confronted hearing learners proudly and confidently with their language and culture essentially took place within a larger movement that led to growing self-esteem and empowerment within the German Deaf community.

Though in effect sign language classes became proper language learning experiences, relationships with more conventional foreign spoken language teaching were explored only much later. Over the years, the following three teaching con-

cepts turned out to be of particular influence and relevance for deaf sign language teachers looking for guidance and materials:

The "Hamburg" concept (Beecken et al. 1999)

When the first academic training for sign language interpreters started at the "Zentrum für Deutsche Gebärdensprache" in Hamburg in 1993/1994, lack of a professional and application-oriented DGS teaching concept became evident. As a consequence, a project was initiated which was to develop a DGS course based on the format and methods developed for the well-known ASL-teaching programme "Signing naturally" (Smith et al. 1988). "Signing Naturally" was adapted in form and content to the cultural and linguistic characteristics of DGS and the German Deaf community.

As the American model, its German version emphasizes direct and lively communication methods. Since the course focuses on language functions and communication and is not primarily based on a systematic exposition of linguistic structures, many sign language lecturers have criticised the lack of a well-founded grammar which would allow for didactically oriented, structured grammar lessons. Notwithstanding this criticism, the

"Grundkurs Deutsche Gebärdensprache", which is now available in two volumes with extensive additional materials, is the most successful and widely used DGS teaching concept in Germany.

The "Frankfurt" concept (Happ 2000)

The teaching concept developed by the sign linguistics team of the University of Frankfurt is a good and useful addition to the "Grundkurs Deutsche Gebärdensprache". The Frankfurt concept was created in the year 2000. It consists of ten lessons which are predominantly based on the grammar translation method, a synthetic-deductive method of foreign language teaching which provides a systematic and rule-orientated approach to language learning. DGS is taught as a foreign language, introducing the units and rules of the language step by step in a grammatical order. The acquisition of communicative competences, on the other hand, is backgrounded in this approach.

The "Aachen" concept (Deaf and Sign Language Research Team 2002)

The third teaching concept which has enjoyed widespread use among Deaf sign language teachers was published by the DESIRE-Team (Deaf and Sign Language

Research) of the RWTH Aachen University. It offers many grammar-oriented lessons but, differently from the Frankfurt concept, it is not a traditional grammatical approach. In four volumes, the Aachen concept offers a comprehensive training course for DGS, characterised by highly detailed course planning of individual teaching hours. It offers suggestions for teaching methods, didactic instructions and theoretical background information concerning linguistic issues. There are also ready-to-use slides and suggestions for texts and drawings to be used on blackboards. The concept serves both teachers and learners and is appreciated for its practical orientation and usefulness.

Sign language research

Research activities that focused on sign language began in the 1980s (see Prillwitz 1982, Ebbinghaus & Hessmann 1989). In 1987, the “Center for German Sign Language”, today’s Institute of German Sign Language and Communication of the Deaf, was founded at the University of Hamburg (<https://www.idgs.uni-hamburg.de/en.html>).

Since the 1990s, academic training for sign language interpreting was established at the University of Hamburg (1994), Magdeburg-Stendal University of

Applied Sciences (1997), the University of Applied Sciences Zwickau (2001) and the Humboldt University of Berlin (2003).

Due to the high demand for sign language interpreters in Germany, two more training programmes have recently opened up at the University of Applied Sciences Landshut (2015) and at the University of Cologne (2017). Significant academic research on sign language has also been carried out at the Goethe University Frankfurt and, more recently, at the Georg-August University Göttingen.

Sign language legislation

Over the last 30 years, confidence and self-awareness of the German Deaf community have grown significantly and deaf people clearly recognize the central role that sign language plays in their lives. However, public use of German Sign Language (Deutsche Gebärdensprache, DGS) is still limited and the language is not applied with any consistency in schools, vocational training and employment.

The 2002 Act on the Equality of Persons with Disabilities (Bundesgleichstellungsgesetz) is generally regarded as a breakthrough for the official recognition of DGS, but it is limited in application and it is couched in terms of traditional disability legislation.

While DGS is expressly recognized as an

independent language, it is seen as just one of a number of communication tools to be applied in the rehabilitation of disabled people, not as the language of a bilingual and bicultural community.

Still, on the basis of legislation of this kind, the provision of sign language interpreters has improved and Deaf people have increasingly been enabled to exercise their rights and gain access to administrative proceedings and other social processes, though regulations remain ambiguous and inconsistent. To give just one example: A deaf woman who experiences domestic violence and seeks counselling will have a hard time in trying to claim financial support to provide for sign language interpreting services. The 2017 Federal Participation Act (Bundes-teilhabe-gesetz), Germany's attempt at implementing the regulations of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, provides no general solution to this problem.

Conclusion

For the German situation, the following tendencies with regard to the teaching of sign language are characteristic:

- There is significant interest and demand for a solid offer of sign language courses for hearing L2 learners, for instance, in adult education centres and evening clas-

ses. This demand can be expected to continue to rise in the context of a society that is inclusive and open to other languages and cultures.

- The demand for well-trained and competent sign language teachers is unabated.
- Significantly more job-qualifying training and further education offers must be developed that enable prospective sign language teachers to prepare for the state examinations currently offered.
- In addition to the classical target groups of sign language teaching (sign language interpreters, communication assistants and hearing L2 learners without specific professional interests), specialized teaching offers need to be developed and established. The lack of qualified sign language teachers is particularly acute in the area of L1 teaching for hearing-impaired children, the teaching of deaf people with multiple disabilities and teaching offered to deaf immigrants.
- Finally, professionalization of sign language teachers will depend on the establishment of basic qualifying training programmes. The idea of a BA programme in sign language teaching has been around for some time. It is high time to turn this idea into reality.

References: <https://www.signteach.eu/index.php/book/references>





Interview with Andreas Costrau

Director of gebaerdenservice.de and one of the first fully state-certified DGS instructors.

What are the strengths/weaknesses

within the situation/vocation of DGS instructors in Germany? What kind of professional training have you done?

Well, to answer your question about my vocation. I did the professional training and what I have learned was good and informative, but it doesn't represent the "language of the people" (everyday DGS user). Us instructors oftentimes teach something different, not the "language of the people". And that's a shame. I would prefer us implementing this "language of the people" into the curriculum. For example: it is said that Deaf people are very blunt, but that's not true – they are visual people. Only hearing people say that.

Deaf people are more open and direct without the stigmata of sexism (the meaning is apparent in the facial expression, not the sign alone). Also, you don't introduce yourself at the beginning of a meeting with MY SIGN NAME WHAT – Deaf people don't use those kinds of sentences. I think it's a shame that DGS

course books don't implement the Deaf culture more. Right now, there are two different level of professional trainings. I'd love to see more of the everyday DGS sign language (BIO-DGS) and less academic DGS sign language (UNI-DGS) used. BIO-DGS uses less mouthing and more mouth gestures. And since you know me, I pay attention to hand forms. In our culture, using those ABC hand forms is not common (like in TEAM, WORKSHOP, IDEA, etc.) It would be nice if the instructors would dive more into the Deaf World. I know it's not easy to get a good professional training.

I'd like to see a new task group being founded to deal with this subject. It's a shame that the Association has different priorities. We should keep the 3D in the language and not change it to 2D. Meaning we should be using prepositions manipulations and substrates. I want to work with people who have grasped that.

Sorry, I've been diverting. Okay, so my goal is to nurture and support our language. I'd love to see the curriculum being adapted to the new concept.

Could you tell us about the development of curriculums of DGS classes in Germany? Do they follow the GERS guidelines? What is done for it? Do you use it in your classes?

I love GERS (CEFR). I have understood what it is about. It'll help to evaluate language levels on a common standard. But, I need intensive training for GERS. I've been waiting for an offer on it for 2 years. It's important for my course concept. I am prepared for it and want to know the standards so I can implement it better. I am really looking forward to that.

This is a very good opportunity for all in-structors. Some sign language schools have courses with GERS level. Now I want to know on what grounds they use it. I don't like this. I would prefer if all of us instructors would use the same level/understanding with it. I think GERS has been specified to level A2. I'm waiting for level B1/B2, so that I can implement it. That's why I need a training. Or the institute visits the sign language school and evaluates their eligibility. That would be great. I am happy to pay for such an evaluation of eligibility. I don't know how it can be done, if it can be done like for spoken languages, maybe by universities or the Institute. But they should work with us and include us in the process. I think we should meet and talk about it.

That will be crucial for the professionalisation.

What standing do DGS instructors have in Germany? Are there differences between standings/vocational trainings/recognition?

The interest in sign language grows. I think the level of popularity is on the same level as Spanish. It would be great if we could leave Spanish behind us and catch up with English. It's got to do with inclusion. But inclusion is for the disabled. Sign language is not disabled. Many of those taking the course tell us they learn so much more than just language – they widen their horizons and get a taste of communication. It's not just about learning the language and the culture, they say that they gain a lot more in their own lives by it. I think that is a positive thing. It's a shame that many instructors don't use sign language to build bridges. It should be more 3D. There are so little Deaf instructors dealing with this subject. It should be included in the professional training.

What should be done in the future to improve the situation of DGS classes in Germany?

Of course, instructors need qualification. But, we need to look at the system they are using. When they use the 2D scheme and ABC hand forms, then a qualification/certification is useless. They need to

implement BIO-DGS into their curriculums. They need to re-evaluate what it is they want to teach. I have a qualification (comment: he's one of the first fully state-certified DGS instructors in Germany). It won't help to have the same qualification as someone teaching 2D style, it's not the same value. I think it's a shame that this might happen, but nevertheless, qualification is important. The instructors themselves need to re-evaluate their way of teaching.

I am not happy with their methods.

It requires a lot of time and experience to be a good instructor. When you are motivated and willing to learn, you will become a good one. It would be great if the course books could get an overhaul. Because an instructor in the beginning needs guidance to become able to develop an own curriculum for his course.

Date of the interview: July 2017



Interview with Falko Neuhäusel

*Sign Language teacher at Hochschule Magdeburg-Stendal;
owner / director of Gebärdenmanufaktur.*

*What are the strengths/
weaknesses within the situation/vocation of
DGS instructors in Germany? What kind of
professional training have you done?*

I'd like to start with one. There are two questions and I want to start with the second part. Shortly after the Wall came down, maybe 1992 or 1993, the first vocational training courses for DGS coaches were offered at the University of Hamburg. Before then, hearing people had taught sign language to other hearing people. The course members were international, for example, Deaf people from Spain, Portugal, Austria and so on. The teachers were employees from the University (the Institute). Thus, I've learned a lot of new things. We received a certificate.

The training took two years and were done in blocks, including the exams. That was the first training in Germany. There, I didn't just learn DGS grammar, but also how to develop teaching materials, how to work with technology, etc. We worked with the book VISTA. It was a great and enlightening time for me.

Now I'll answer 1.1. I can't really judge that point, because I haven't given it much thought. I just know that there are no trainings for DGS coaches on university level.

There are several vocational trainings at different institutes established. But no university level. That's why we (University of Magdeburg-Stendal) have difficulties finding qualified sign language instructors. Especially in Saxony-Anhalt, there are almost no sign language coaches. Some are teaching at community college (VHS) although they didn't have any formal training. I don't like that. They are not professionals.

The state's Deaf Associations offer seminars for sign language instructors. Back then, the sensitivity about the quality of teachers wasn't there (DGS grammar, methods, didactic, etc.). It has gotten better since then. We should support the motivation for coaches and the pay should improve. I don't know if you can make a career out of it. I like it that the GIB in Nuremberg offers formal training for sign language instructors and some deaf people from Saxony-Anhalt have joined that training.

Since the recognition of sign language, the demand of hearing people to learn sign language has risen a lot, so we need more deaf coaches. A lot of hearing people are interested in learning sign language. I wish for more deaf people doing the training and working with us.

What standing do DGS instructors have in Germany? Are there differences between standings/vocational trainings/recognition?

I've already signed about this; some teach at community college and don't have a higher standing. They teach following their "guts" but without didactic methods. But there are some coaches who have a higher standing because they work at a sign language school or university. They receive positive feedback and respect from the pupils. It depends immensely on the teacher who have worked out the qualification. And the worked-out materials for class as well as the competence of the teacher. That's why you receive respect. Even if you don't have a degree from university. Sadly, most teachers are "underpaid". It would be great if we had a university degree. But I don't have one, sadly. But the development in that area is getting better, there are more and more teachers with academic degrees and setting up their own businesses (sign language schools). I like that. They have the natural language and can facilitate it better.

But I can't speak for all of Germany.

Could you tell us about the development of curriculums of DGS classes in Germany? Do they follow the GERS (CEFR) guidelines? What is done for it? Do you use it in your classes?

The teaching material has improved a lot. Back then there was practically nothing and everyone had to "invent" it for themselves. Today, there are DVDs, books and course material. That way, you can develop a concept for your course. Nowadays you can take ideas or material from the internet and implement them into your concept. That's great. We need to go further. It's not perfect yet. Vocabulary material is still missing. A DGS corpus is great so students can learn at home.

I take GERS as an orientation, but I'm not yet following it by the letter, since it's still new for all of us. My concept is similar to that which GERS is describing. Our goal is to implement GERS. It's great, because you can easily see which level of DGS one has.

Also, I use more PowerPoint these days. My old transparencies are used less and less. But I still use the blackboard.

What should be done in the future to improve the situation of DGS classes in Germany?

First of all, I like it that there is the training for DGS teachers at the GIB Nurem-

berg. I don't recall their requirements exactly. I wish that more deaf people could be working within the teaching field of DGS. They should be more courageous and self-conscious and found their own company and lead it. This should be supported. Also, I think GERS should be progressed further and more trainings for teachers should be offered. Many instructors don't have a clue about GERS.

In Germany, they should all have the same level/knowledge. Thus, those who want to join a sign language school, a community college or university could switch between those institutions without having to get certificates for proof.

That would be a huge advantage. They wouldn't need to re-do their exams. And that's not only for Germany, but for Europe. It's not about language, it's about the level.

Date of the interview: July 2017

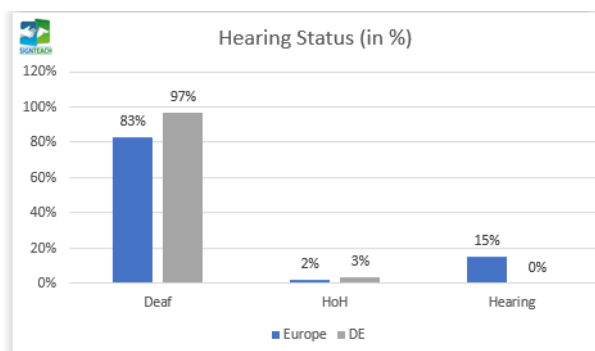


Results SignTeach Survey: Germany

Number of respondents

31 responses.

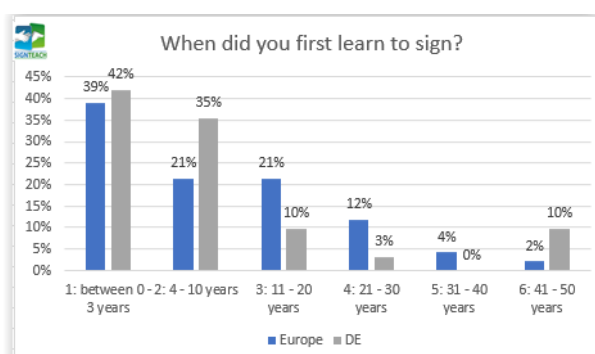
Hearing Status



97% of the German respondents (grey) are deaf, 3% are hard of hearing.

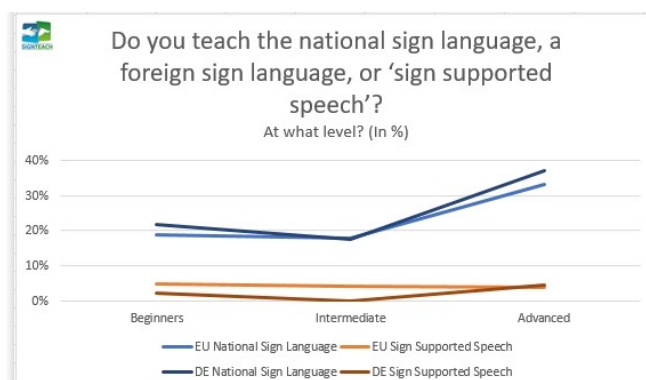
Native signers?

Almost 80% of the German respondents



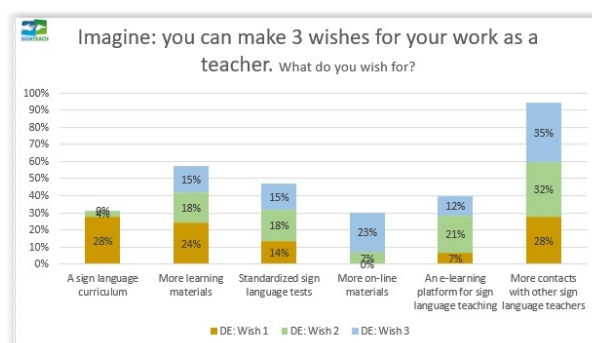
(grey) learned to sign before age 11.

Do you teach the national sign language, or sign supported speech?



Almost all respondents teach German Sign Language, most at an advanced level (e.g. teaching in training programmes for sign language interpreters). Very few respondents teach LBG, "Signed German".

Imagine: you can make 3 wishes for your work as a teacher. What do you wish for?



Most German respondents wish for more contacts with other sign language teachers.

Open question: Good examples, advice?

"To work with sign language teachers in a group because we can develop materials together."

Open question: Barriers?

"There is a lack of interest from younger deaf people in our region to become sign language teachers. The preparation class for the state certification exam is expensive and has to be paid for privately."

"Government."

More results can be found on the [Sign-Teach website](#).

Country Report

5.4 Iceland



5.4 Iceland *Valgerður Stefánsdóttir, Samskiptamiðstöð heyrnarlausra og heyrnarskertra, Reykjavík (IS)*

History

The first school for the deaf was founded on September 4th 1867 when Rev. Páll Pálsson was appointed the teacher of the



deaf. He took „mute“ students into his home and taught them using finger-spelling and gestures. Páll used the Danish manual alpha-bet because he had been educated in Denmark himself.

It can be assumed that at this time Icelandic Sign language started to develop amongst the students.

1974

At the beginning of June 1974 the Nordic Council of the Deaf (Døves Nordiske Råd) held a congress in Iceland. After the congress, funding was started so that communication with the other Nordic or in fact any other countries, could be increased. It was also decided to hold courses in Sign Language and publish a Sign Language Dictionary.

1976

In 1976 two deaf ladies, Hervör Guðjónsdóttir and Sigurborg Skjaldberg, held a course in sign language for the

teachers at the Deaf School. They made the teaching material themselves but it was based on the Danish book „Undervisningsblade i Tegnsprog“.

In the eighties the Deaf School contained a preschool where parents of deaf children received counselling and courses in signed Icelandic. The teachers at these courses were a few deaf students born in 1964 or earlier, all volunteers. At this time the sign Language users were not aware of their language, neither its structure nor grammar and the teaching was therefore based on lists of words in Icelandic and a sign given for each word. The students continued to hold courses, but because of lack of research, many questions concerning the grammar were unanswerable and therefore they felt unsure about their teaching.

1978

In 1978 The Icelandic Association of the Deaf published the first Sign Language Dictionary. It contained about 700 Icelandic signs but also about 6-700 signs that had been borrowed from other Nordic sign languages. A reviewed edition was published in 1987 containing 1800 signs, of which many were borrowed from The Danish Sign

Language Dictionary, Dansk Tegn Ordbog. It also contained signs that the Nordic Council had chosen as the common Nordic signs. At this time no research on sign languages was available. Later it came to light that it is not natural to coordinate usage of signs between countries, because sign languages have developed independently in each of the Nordic countries.

1986

In 1986 a Nordic Cultural Festival of the Deaf was held in Iceland and the Deaf Association had to provide Icelandic sign language interpreters at the festival. Therefore, during the winter of 1985-86, at the deaf club, these new teachers taught Icelandic Sign Language to a group of ten people with the aim that seven of them would be ready to interpret at the festival. Four interpreters „graduated“ and interpreted at the festival.

Training of Sign language teachers

During the winter of 1986-87 a course for instructors in sign language was held by the Deaf School in cooperation with The Icelandic Association of the Deaf. The course covered 86 hours and all the participants were deaf or hard of hearing. The same winter the Deaf school offered some of their teachers „interpreter training“ covering 100 hours

where two deaf instructors and two new “interpreters“ worked together on teaching Icelandic Sign Language and interpreting.

1990—now

The Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of hearing (SHH) was founded in 1990. Its function is to research and teach Icelandic Sign Language, to provide interpreting and other services. Today the Sign Language teachers at SHH all hold a teachers diploma (B.Ed).

In 1994, an academic program in Sign Language Linguistics and Interpreting was started at the University of Iceland, in cooperation with SHH. Since that time, the teachers at SHH are required to take additional courses on sign language linguistics and deaf culture at the University of Iceland. At SHH they receive training concerning teaching Icelandic Sign Language.

Curricula, learning materials, CEFR

In the beginning, the sign language teachers at SHH mainly used *Signing Naturally: Student Videotext and Workbook* as a textbook, translated and adapted, but slowly the Icelandic material used today started to develop. This material is now under revision and at the same time being adapted to the CEFR.

Number of SL teachers

At SHH there are now three sign language teachers. They teach at the Center, in high schools, elementary schools and at the Sign Language Linguistics and Interpreting Programme at the University of Iceland.

Sign language research

SHH and The Institute of Linguistics at the University of Iceland together form a Centre for Sign Language Research. The aim of the Centre is to encourage and support further researches in sign language, communication in sign language, interpreting, language development of sign language speaking children and the teaching of sign language and interpreting. It also aims at encouraging and supporting cooperation between those that undertake these researches to try to ensure the best usage of knowledge and funding.

In recent years [SignWiki](#), a web and mobile platform for Sign Languages and Deaf Education, was developed at SHH and launched in January 2012. Here you can find an Icelandic Sign Language Dictionary, teaching and educational material, scholarly articles, articles and short courses in sign language. The users of this website can contribute material and signs and change and improve what is already there. When these words are

written, about 10.000 signs can be found on SignWiki, the list is always growing.

Sign language legislation

On June 7th 2011 legislation was passed by the Icelandic Parliament confirming the Icelandic Sign Language as the first language of those who rely on it in expression and communication, and of their children. The legislation also states that Icelandic Sign Language and Icelandic are equal as means of expression in communication between people and that it is prohibited to discriminate people because of which of the languages they use. The legislation also proclaimed the founding of a Language Committee on Icelandic Sign Language.



Alþingi (parliament). Deaf people were in the parliament house when ITM was recognized. Their t-shirts say I love sign language.





Interview with Valgerður Stefánsdóttir

Director of the Communication Center for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing in Iceland

What, in your opinion, are the strengths or weaknesses of

the current system in Iceland?

The legal environment for Icelandic sign language is strong in Iceland. On June 7, 2011, the Icelandic Parliament passed a [Law on the Status of Icelandic and Icelandic Sign Language](#). Articles 3, 5, 7, and 13 of the Language Act contain some detailed provisions in support of the users of Icelandic Sign Language (ITM). ITM is declared the “first language” of persons with hearing impairment, and it is a responsibility of the government and of municipalities to preserve it, strengthen it and to support its use. In accordance with Article 3, all persons who have a need for sign language must be given the opportunity to learn Icelandic sign language and to use it from the beginning of their language acquisition, or as soon as deafness, hearing impairment or deaf-blindness has been diagnosed. Their immediate family members shall have the same right.

The weaknesses, on the other hand, appear in the language ideologies, the

attitudes towards the language and the people who speak it, which do not comply with the text of the Act.

The right of people to learn ITM according to the law is not respected in so far as the learning of the language is not easy due to, for example, availability. The professional settings for sign language teachers are insecure, wages are low and teaching opportunities in society are lacking. Teachers complain that they are not able to increase their skills in a special field and they need to undertake a variety of tasks such as counseling, family-courses, children’s courses, material production, college and university teaching etc.

Can you give us examples of ‘best practice’ in your country?

Excellent co-operation between the University of Iceland and the Communication Centre.

The Communication Centre and the University of Iceland’s Institute of Linguistics have a formal co-operation on research in ITM and all the sign language teachers who teach at the university come from the Communication Centre.



An undergraduate programme in Sign Language Linguistics and Interpreting is offered at the University of Iceland (UI). Teacher training programme at the University is flexible regarding the composition of studies and allows ITM to be one of the elective subjects to specialize in for teaching.

The development of all learning materials for ITM teaching is centralized in the Communication Centre, funded by the government, and produced in co-operation by a group of deaf and hearing professionals. All our materials use a growing database of signs in *Signwiki.com* that everyone can access online.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers in your county?

The study at the university meets all the requirements of a regular B.Ed. / BA programme. Deaf teachers with a B. Ed degree and no education in ITM can specialise in ITM by taking additional courses in ITM grammar, the status of ITM and history and culture of the ITM community, at the UI.

The Icelandic Communication Centre provides those sign language teachers who teach at the Centre or at the University, with additional training.

Teachers are required to have a BA or B.Ed degree, a specialisation in ITM grammar and history and culture of the

ITM community, for appointment as a teacher.

There is no central registration system of qualified ITM teachers and no quality control of sign language teaching except at the Centre.

The school system does not offer ITM teaching as L1 or sets any special requirements for teaching deaf or hard-of-hearing children ITM as L1.

There are no requirements in the public school other than general teacher training.

There is no special education for teachers who want to teach ITM as a first language or bilingual teaching (IS/ITM).

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in your country? Are curricula based on the CEFR?

The curricula developed by our Centre for L2 are now being adapted to the CEFR.

What, in your opinion, is the way forward for sign language teaching & the training of sign language teachers in your country, and/or in Europe?

We would like to set up a model for ITM teacher education at the University of Iceland. Tailor the studies from the courses offered by the University and add other courses, especially suited for ITM teachers like didactics of teaching in SL or teaching SL and bilingual teaching.

We would like to have close cooperation with European sign language teachers, if possible to make a European study program and have national or European standards for sign language teachers.

Date of the Interview: April 2017



Interview with Rannveig Sverrisdóttir

Assistant professor in Sign Language Linguistics and Interpretation, University of Iceland

What, in your opinion, are the strengths/ weaknesses of the current system in your country?

Having a law on Icelandic Sign Language as the first language of the Deaf in Iceland, as well as that Icelandic Sign Language is being covered in the curriculum for elementary schools in Iceland are definitely the strengths of the system in Iceland. Also, having sign language and interpretation as a subject at a university level.

The weaknesses of the system are negative attitudes. This can be seen both in lack of actions (despite the law) and in poor financial contributions to the field. Ignorance and myths of sign languages and deaf culture make the system weak as well.

Can you give us examples of 'best practice' in your country?

The acknowledgement of sign language/ sign language interpreting as a subject of higher education at the University of Iceland as well as the co-operation

between the University and the Communication Centre for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing within the fields of teaching and doing research.

Also, having a language committee, as the law assumes.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers in your country? Is the system as accessible Deaf teachers, as for hearing teachers?

At the moment there is no formal accreditation of sign language teachers in Iceland. Educated teachers for elementary school (B.Ed.) could (before) take sign language as a subject but that has not been on the programme for some years now.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in your country? Are curricula based on the CEFR?

Iceland now has a representative of Icelandic Sign Language working on adaptation of the CEFR for the language.

What, in your opinion, is the way forward for sign language teaching & the training of sign language teachers in your country, and/ or in Europe?

In my opinion, it is important to increase the requirements for sign language teachers and their training, both in Iceland and in Europe.

There should be a study program that has sign language as a special subject so teachers can be trained in teaching sign language as L1 and L2, and in teaching in (Icelandic) Sign Language. In Iceland, this can be done at the School of Education

at the University of Iceland in co-operation with specialist working at the Communication Centre and at the Sign Language Linguistics programme at the School of Humanities.

Date of the Interview: June 2017

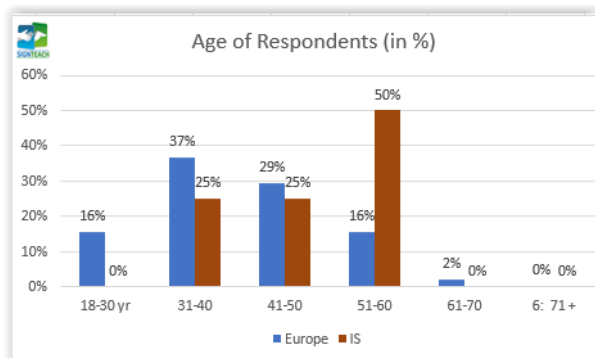


Results SignTeach Survey: Iceland

Number of respondents

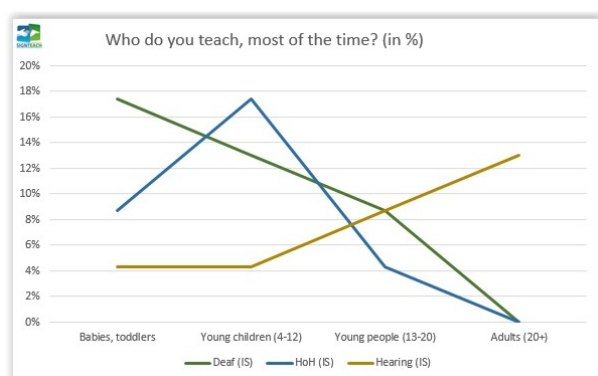
4 respondents from Iceland. At the time of the Survey, the total number of sign language teachers in Iceland was 4.

Age groups



Relatively, the Icelandic sign language teachers (brown) are older than their European colleagues. This is mostly an effect of the small number of teachers in Iceland; one teacher has recently retired.

Who do you teach, most of the time?



Sign language teachers in Iceland teach more deaf people than their colleagues in Europe. Almost all of the deaf learners are babies and young children (under 12).

The teachers teach sign language, not 'sign supported speech'.

Do you work together with other sign language teachers?

All respondents says: yes.

Three wishes for further training?

The main wish of the sign language teachers in Iceland: further training in using the CEFR.

Open question: Advice, good examples?

"We must tell hearing people about the history and culture of the deaf. Because most of them do not know about this. Sign language teachers must always know about history."

Open question: Barriers?

"It is difficult to teach children who have a CI. They don't know anything about our sign language's grammar and culture. Because they aren't integrated in the deaf community."

"For us, I think the most difficult thing is to teach children - because we don't have any program for them. I use some book for teaching English and I adapt it for sign language."

More results can be found on the [Sign-Teach website](#).

Country Report

5.5 Italy



5.5 Italy

Michele Castiglione ISLA, Siena (IT)

History

The first Italian research on LIS (Italian Sign Language) was started in the 1980's at the Institute of Psychology in Rome (now the Institute of Cognitive Sciences and Technologies) of the National Research Council. These investigations resulted for the first time in a description of the most general characteristics of the structure of LIS, including its lexical, morphological and morphological-syntactic structures. The research work, since its inception, was conducted in close collaboration between both hearing and deaf people, each with different but complementary skills.

During this period, Virginia Volterra's "pioneering" research on sign language intersected with the curiosity and interest of Serena Corazza, who then continued to deepen her linguistic studies at Gallaudet University in Washington.

For all, including researchers and those who already knew and used LIS, these first research projects led to the awareness of LIS as a language in all respects.

In 1992 the first bilingual dictionary of LIS was published, edited by Elena Radutzky.

Training of sign language teachers

The last 39 years mark a watershed in the training of sign language teachers, with a before and an after in the training methods that have much changed, especially because of the results of scientific research.

Before this time, the teaching was based mainly on a "word-sign" lexical approach. The teachers did not possess or follow a true methodology. In this sense, the teaching work was limited to imparting some notions.

Once research on LIS had begun, it brought a lot of attention to the teaching of it. At first, some seminars and short intensive 2/3 day courses were organized, focusing on teaching methodologies, then eventually the first courses entirely dedicated to teaching teachers were organized. The number of hours that these courses necessitated increased as we see in today's courses. Currently discussion forums are much used as a tool that encourages comparative dialogue between LIS teachers.

Curricula, learning materials, CEFR

Teaching programs vary depending on the type of activity, the needs of the tar-

get group, and the objectives to be achieved. There are several forms: from awareness-raising courses that provide generic and basic information, to programs that consist of a short module focused on specific and sectoral language, for example for the police or for people who want to set up a service counter for deaf individuals.

The most popular model of LIS courses is one that is divided into three levels of teaching, although recently a small Roman association, in line with the results of scientific research, has introduced a fourth level of teaching. However, this is a unique approach which is not yet widespread at the national level.

The textbook used by the teachers for the three levels of instruction is that of the "Metodo Vista", which also has workbooks for students for all three levels.

Many courses consist of two lessons per week, with the majority of hours devoted to teaching sign language and a small part focusing on the more theoretical subjects of Deaf culture, history and linguistics, gradually increasing with more specific and detailed information as the level of instruction goes up.

Another type of program is the one used for intensive courses: in these cases there are daily lectures with a greater

number of hours, always structured according to the Metodo Vista, with the exception of on-line instruction (which still requires a certain number of in person contact hours) structured according to the Metodo C'E', the teaching model most popular in Turin.

There are very specific teaching situations, such as those taking place at Universities where the duration and content of the lessons vary according to the programmes, from the courses for communication assistants where lessons are mainly focused on theory and useful techniques in educational or school contexts, to programmes for interpreters in training, that focus on techniques of interpretation and an in-depth study of linguistics.

Number of sign language teachers

According to the national register, there are hardly more than 100 teachers of Italian Sign Language, but there are many other teachers who, although not included in this list, carry out teaching activities. The overall number of sign language teachers fluctuates between 150 and 200.

For many of them, the teaching is not their main paid job; this is often something totally different.

Sign language legislation

Italy is still awaiting a law on the recognition of the Italian Sign Language. It is therefore difficult to predict the consequences that a LIS recognition law would have on LIS teaching because it will depend on the content of the legislative text, whether or not it would be possible

to create and encourage scientific research and teaching.

Despite the legislative vacuum, in fact, the teaching of LIS is already present in some Italian universities and several linguistic research projects have been launched.







Interview with Michele Castiglione

Sign language teacher, coordinator of sign language courses

Michele Castiglione has been a sign language

teacher since 1995. He has taught different levels and has long been a coordinator of sign language courses. For two years he worked as a LIS teacher at the SSLMIT University and he also taught deaf secondary school students at the Magarotto Institute of Padova. He has been a member of the examining committee to certify LIS teachers and has given many presentations on the subjects of communication, linguistics, deaf culture, the role and job of a teachers' coordinator.

In 2011 he was one of the founders of the movement LIS SUBITO! and was politically very active in the efforts made to obtain legal recognition for Italian Sign Language. Currently he is involved in the training and professional development of sign language interpreters and is a member of ENSLT (European Network Sign Language Teachers) since 2015. He has been collaborating with Mason Perkins Deafness Fund Onlus for different workshops and to create a platform for educa-

tional use inspired by the bilingual story 'Stella'.

What, in your opinion, are the strengths or weaknesses of the current system in Italy?

Among the many points that represent the Italian system, I've chosen to call attention to several in particular.

The first has to do with Italian associations: the smallest, which for years now have devoted themselves to teaching, have reached a good level in terms of quality. This is due not so much to the length of their experience as to their ability to connect the job of teaching with new discoveries arising over time thanks to scientific research. This relationship to ongoing updates has allowed the small associations to distinguish themselves from other organisations found in Italy and to carry on successfully with their work.

The second pertains to the quality level of the teaching: it has improved greatly and, by contrast to the situation forty years ago when the grammar taught was strictly anchored to the structure of Italian, teachers today carry over the grammatical rules of sign language.

It must be said, however, that the same difficulties still persist in evaluation during intermediate and final testing and in the content of material to be presented.

The third point concerns the recent introduction of a fourth level of teaching sign language, a model still not very widespread throughout Italy yet adopted in a virtuous manner by several small associations that have clearly established length in terms of hours. In other cases, the number of hours varies in relation to the specific requirements of the project.

If the creation of a fourth level of teaching stands as a positive innovation, the down side is that an inadequate level of skills persists among teachers, considering the fact that in order to access the fourth level of teaching, it's important to have first gained substantial experience in the three earlier levels.

A similar situation occurs when, during a course, it proves necessary to entrust the teaching of the more theoretical and linguistical aspects to a different expert teacher if the practicum teacher is not equipped with these specific skills. This is a possible weak point.

The final point has to do with materials. In Italy, sign language teachers have for many years now made use of a manual

for the three levels of teaching made up of one part dedicated to the teacher and the other to the student. With respect to the parameters laid out by the CEFR, this manual covers linguistic levels A1 and B1, even though the contents only partially reflect the communicative goals referred to in the Common European Framework of Reference. The fact of having ready-made material on hand means that many teachers faithfully follow the contents offered by the manual.

Can you give us example of 'best practice' in your country?

Italian teachers have begun to look upon European events and teacher-training opportunities with ever greater interest. Among these, for example, there's the symposium organized last autumn by the ENSLT (European Network of Sign Language Teachers, November 2016) in order to explore teaching techniques appropriate to the parameters found within level B1 of the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). On that occasion there was an appreciable response on the part of Italian teachers who took part in the European comparison, proving the fact that teaching in Italy upholds and continues to improve its level of quality.

Tools for teaching are also growing

thanks to increasingly advanced technologies that allow teachers to access materials with much more ease compared to the past, such as the projection of video material instead of paper print-ups, or still images from transparencies shown through an overhead projector. These technological advances create the chance to gather and select signed video material to be found on many online channels, and to make use of an ever-richer supply of materials.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers in your country?

Currently the total number of sign language teachers in Italy has not yet received official accreditation from the MIUR (Ministry of Instruction, Universities, and Research). This is also due to the fact that Italy has no law recognizing and regulating Italian Sign Language.

Nevertheless, several Italian universities avail themselves of the collaboration of Italian Sign Language teachers, who are chosen following an interview and the evaluation of their CV, or also because they hold a university degree pertinent to a specific area of teaching.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in your country? Are curricula based on the CEFR?

Small associations, which for many years now have devoted themselves to teaching and have taken part in scientific research on sign language, setting themselves apart from other associations, have already committed to adapting their work to the parameters laid out by the CEFR: in this case, the efforts to adapt may be attentively verified step by step during work experience.

What in your opinion is the way forward for sign language teaching and training of sign language teachers in your country and/or Europe?

I believe that the situation of sign language teachers can improve only on two conditions: the creation of an association dedicated exclusively to sign language teachers, and the obligatory requirement that all teachers hold a university degree as well as teacher certification, as is required of hearing teachers who teach spoken languages. This would create true equality between hearing and deaf teachers.

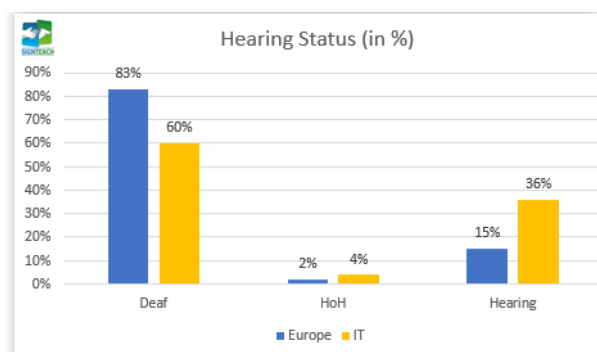
Date of the Interview: April 2017

Results SignTeach Survey: Italy

Number of respondents

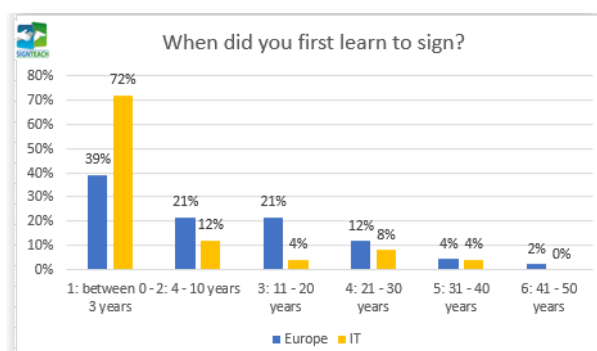
25 respondents.

Hearing Status



60% of the Italian respondents (yellow) is deaf, 4% hard of hearing, 36% hearing.

Native signers?



72% of the Italian respondents (yellow) learned to sign before the fourth birthday. The hearing sign language teachers probably learned to sign at home, from deaf parents and can still be considered 'native signers'.

Have you had any special training for teaching sign language? ?

Compared to their European colleagues, fewer sign language teachers have had special training for teaching sign language. 67% of the Italian respondents say



yes (blue, on the right), 33% say 'no' (orange, on the left).

Open question: good examples, advice?

"I am convinced that teachers of sign language must graduate in Linguistics and they must have specific training in the teaching of sign language. Many teachers of sign language here in Italy do not have a good educational training."

"To be bilingual of course, to know the linguistics and grammar of the two languages L1 and L2, let's stop allowing people to teach sign language just because they are deaf. For teaching a language you need to study for years the L1 and L2."

Open question: Barriers?

"In Italy, sign language is not recognised as a language yet."

"LIS is not recognised by the state. Some organisations have sign language teachers, who have had no training at all."

More results can be found on the [Sign-Teach website](#).

Country Report

5.6 the Netherlands



5.6 the Netherlands

Liesbeth Pyfers, Pragma, Hoensbroek (NL)

In some respects, the situation of sign language teachers and sign language teaching in the Netherlands is different from most other countries. Yet the beginnings were the same.

History

The Sign Language of the Netherlands (SLN or in Dutch: NGT) has been used for centuries, but wasn't researched and recognised as a language until the 1950's. The first sign language dictionary was not published until 1988. Until that time, sign language teachers were deaf people who had had no training in teaching a sign language and who developed their own materials. One of the first teachers of sign language in the Netherlands was Wim Emmerik. When he started in 1977 he insisted that he taught pantomime, not sign language. In those days, sign language was used within the Deaf Community, but it was not taught to hearing

people. Later, Wim Emmerik became an internationally known sign language poet.

Other deaf sign language users followed Wim's example and began to teach the Sign Language of the Netherlands. At first, they taught hearing professionals: parent counsellors, teachers, social workers. These professionals would then teach the signs, usually as 'Signed Dutch', to parents of young deaf children. Signed Dutch uses signs to 'support' or 'visualize' spoken words. It is not sign language, the speaker uses voice and the word order of the spoken language.

In the beginning, there were many discussions about the question whether deaf people could be allowed to teach sign language to hearing parents of young deaf children—who usually had had no previous contacts with deaf people, or sign language. How would they communicate?

Things changed fast. Deaf people became more aware of the importance of their own language and began their continuing struggle for equal rights and recognition of their language and culture. More and more research showed



that sign language did not harm deaf children, but was, in fact, crucial for their language, cognitive and last but not least: social emotional development.

taught as a second language with the main focus on reading and writing.

As a result of these developments, the demand for sign language courses for



By 1995 all schools for the Deaf in the Netherlands were officially 'bilingual'. Teachers used the Sign Language of the Netherlands as the language of communication and instruction in the classrooms. Deaf teaching assistants and deaf teachers made their entrance and became role models, both for the children and the hearing teachers. Dutch was

parents, teachers, and then sign language interpreters grew rapidly.

Sign language interpreters

In 1988, deaf people in the Netherlands obtained the right to a sign language interpreter—for a limited number of hours per year. This eventually led to the establishment in 1998 of a four-year interpret-

er training programme—and more demand yet for sign language teachers, sign language curricula, sign language dictionaries and learning materials.

Training of sign language teachers

In 1992 the national [Dutch Sign Centre](#) was established with government funding. The Centre develops curricula for sign language teaching, teaches sign language teachers, produces materials and sign language dictionaries, and does research. The training of teachers is informal, there is no registration or certification of teachers who complete the training. Over the years, the training of sign language teachers by the Dutch Sign Centre has changed to take into account changing insights and changes in target groups.

In 1998 the [Institute for Sign Language and Deaf Studies of the Hogeschool Utrecht](#) started the only 4-year training programme for sign language teachers and interpreters in the Netherlands. It is a formal Bachelor training programme (B.Ed) with regular entry requirements. In 2004, a Master programme (M.Ed) was added.

On the positive side, students at the HU receive a solid training in sign language and sign language teaching. The downside, few deaf sign language teachers

meet the entry requirements, and/or can afford the costs of the 4-year training programme. As a result, most of the students are hearing and not native sign language users. Many start the training with limited or even no sign language skills and little or no knowledge of, or experience with the Deaf community.

There is no registration of teachers who graduate. In the Netherlands, anyone can call him-/herself a sign language teacher. When people look for a sign language course, they often don't know if the teacher will be deaf or hearing, or what training he or she has had.

Curricula, learning materials, CEFR

The Dutch Sign Centre has developed curricula, learning materials and an e-learning environment for sign language courses for different target groups (parents, teachers, general public) and different levels. The curricula have recently been updated to take into account CEFR developments.

Schools for the Deaf use a special curriculum, developed to teach the Sign Language of the Netherlands to deaf children.

Several independent sign language teachers have developed their own commercial curricula; some of these are for spe-

cial target groups or based on a specific methodology for spoken L2 teaching (e.g. TPRS by [Gebarentaal voor Iedereen](#), in English: Sign Language for All).

Number of SL-teachers

Because there is no registration of sign language teachers, we don't know how many sign language teachers there are in the Netherlands. Many teachers are employed by the schools for the Deaf, some by universities, some by Deaf Centres while others are self-employed.

The [National Organisation of Language Teachers](#) has a section for teachers of sign language; however, the section only has a limited number of members and has not been very active in recent years.

Sign language research

Four Universities have a sign language research programme: Amsterdam, Nijmegen, Leiden and Utrecht (for addresses and links, see the [SignTeach website](#)).

Sign language legislation

Since the beginning of the 1980s organisations for the Deaf in the Netherlands have fought for recognition of the Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT) as the official language of deaf people.

A major incentive for this struggle was the resolution of the European Parliament in

1988, with its call on the Commission to make a proposal to the Council concerning official recognition of the sign language used by deaf people in each Member State; and its call on the Member States to abolish any remaining obstacles to the use of sign language and to support pilot projects aimed at teaching sign language to hearing children and adults, using deaf people trained for the purpose and to back research in this area.

Recognition of the Sign Language of the Netherlands however, has proved difficult, as not even spoken Dutch is enshrined in federal legislation. Despite a lack of official legal recognition as an independent language, sign language is mentioned in educational and care legislation.

Back to the beginning?

Many things have changed, but in some respects it seems as if we're back where we started, 40 years ago:

- The Sign Language of the Netherlands: still no legal recognition.
- Many sign language teachers in the Netherlands are hearing. According to our Survey: 53%. This percentage is much higher than in any of the other European countries.
- Many of the sign language teachers in the Netherlands (also) teach Signed

Dutch. At the beginners and intermediate level: almost as often as they teach NGT, the Sign Language of the Netherlands. Again, these percentages are higher than in any of the other European countries.

- Few deaf children now learn the Sign Language of the Netherlands as their first language. In the Survey, the respondents report that they teach less than 5% of their courses to deaf babies or toddlers. The majority of the learners are hearing adults.
- On average, the deaf sign language teachers in the Netherlands have received less training than the hearing sign language teachers. Hearing sign language teachers on the other hand, again on average, have learned the Sign Language of the Netherlands as a second language in a school context, have fewer contacts with 'real' sign language users, and are less involved in the Deaf community.
- Although we now have sign language dictionaries, both printed and online, high-quality learning materials, sign language apps and an e-learning platform for sign language teachers, 40-50% of the Dutch respondents of the Survey say that they develop their own learning materials. Their main

wishes for their work: more learning materials and more online learning materials.

What we don't know: is this the way forward (or backwards?) for all European countries, or is the Netherlands an exception?

What we do know is that all Dutch respondents, as well as the experts who we interviewed, agree that more collaboration is needed, both nationally and internationally.







Interview with Trude Schermer

Director of the Dutch Sign Centre, Amersfoort (NL)

Can you tell us something about the Dutch Sign Centre?

The Dutch Sign Centre (www.gebarententrum.nl) was established in 1996 and is the national independent centre of expertise for the Sign Language of the Netherlands (NGT) and for Signed Dutch (NmG). As Lexicographic Institute for NGT the Dutch Sign Centre aims to collect signs from deaf native signers in the Netherlands, to maintain and develop the lexicon of NGT further and to make the lexicon available by means of an online sign dictionary which contains both standard signs and regional variants.

With our work we want to build a bridge between deaf NGT users, the Deaf community, and all people who use signs. We want to contribute to a greater visibility of NGT as a language in the Netherlands and to strengthen the position of deaf people who use NGT in the Dutch society.

Another main activity is the development and production of teaching materials, (digital) dictionaries and educational materials.

Other activities: researching the grammar of NGT, workshops, providing information about NGT and advising on the use of signs in the communications with different target groups.

The Dutch Sign Centre employs a team of 11 staff members.

What, in your opinion, are the strengths or weaknesses of the current system in the Netherlands?

One of the weaknesses of the Dutch system is that almost all students who study at the Hogeschool Utrecht to become a sign language teacher are hearing and achieve B2 level of NGT at the most. Many start without any knowledge of sign language or the Deaf Community. The link between NGT teachers and its native users is becoming less and less.

Can you give us examples of 'best practice' in your country?

I can give you two examples. One: the development of almost all learning materials has been centralized in the nineties and it was a joint effort of the Dutch Deaf Community and Deaf Education Administrators. It has been responsibility of the Dutch Sign Centre: a group of deaf and hearing professionals, working together.

Another best practice: the Dutch Sign Centre is also the national centre for NGT lexicography which is partly funded by the Dutch Government. All our materials use a growing database of standard signs and regional variants which is accessible via an online dictionary.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers in your country?

The training programme of the Hogeschool Utrecht meets all the requirements of a regular BA or MA programme. The Dutch Sign Centre trains sign language teachers, and so do the schools for the deaf. Unfortunately, we do not have a central registration system of qualified teachers; there is no quality control of independent sign language teachers. Anyone who wants, can teach sign language in the Netherlands.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in your country? Are curricula based on the CEFR?

The curricula developed by our Centre have been adapted and are now based



The team of the Dutch Sign Centre, 2016

on the CEFR. Curricula developed by [Kentalis](#) (the national organisation of schools for the deaf) are also based on CEFR.

What, in your opinion, is the way forward for sign language teaching & the training of sign language teachers in your country, and/or in Europe?

We must cooperate much more closely, both nationally and internationally. Sign language teachers, especially those who work independently, often see each other as competitors, fighting for the same students or jobs.

Legal recognition of the Sign Language of the Netherlands will help, as will national or European standards for sign language teachers. Another development that we will have to deal with: most of the new materials that we now develop are for Signed Dutch, not for Dutch Sign Language, because this is what schools and parents of deaf children ask for. If we are not careful, soon only a handful of children, deaf or hearing, will learn the Sign Language of the Netherlands as a first language.

Do you have any recommendations that you want to share with us?

It is important to stimulate young deaf signers to inform parents of deaf children about their experiences in life and the advantages of a bilingual education.

Date of the Interview: June 2017



IGT&D

The questions were answered by a group of Professionals from IGT&D (Instituut voor Gebaren, Taal & Dovenstudies), Hogeschool Utrecht NL, University of Applied Sciences)

What, in your opinion, are the strengths or weaknesses of the current system in the Netherlands? That is, the current system of teaching sign language and the training of sign language teachers?

Strengths: in the Netherlands, we have a Bachelor Program Sign Language Teacher as well as a Master Program.

Weaknesses: Not all students have strong connections with the Deaf community

Some schools for the deaf do not regard sign language as the first language choice since the CI has been introduced.

It is not possible (by law) to select students who enrol in the Bachelor program for Sign Language teachers and interpreters; the Netherlands has an open access registration system for all students. This sometimes leads to students with less 'aptitude' for signing or teaching to enrol.

Can you give us examples of 'best practice', in your country?

Some organisations (Kentalis, Auris, Hogeschool Utrecht [Utrecht University of Applied Sciences, HU]) work together

to offer a sign language program to professionals who work in Health Care. All organisations recognise the CEFR as a tool to award sign language levels to sign language learners.

At Universities (e.g. Radboud University and Utrecht University of Applied Sciences) there is research on sign language pedagogy.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers in your country?

Is there a (formal, informal) system? How does it work? Does it work well? Does it include different qualifications for teachers of different target groups, e.g. teaching parents, teaching university students, etc.? Is the system as accessible for Deaf teachers as for hearing teachers?

There is a Bachelor as well as a Master program with an accredited degree (B.Ed and M.Ed), but the title is not protected and in fact, everyone can call himself a sign language teacher. In addition to the bachelor and master program, short NGT programs are offered a./o. by the Dutch Sign Centre. The latter serves the group of sign language teachers who cannot, or

do not want to, follow the bachelor program. Teachers certified by one of these programs can teach all groups (e.g. parents, university students, etc.), but some Institutes (for example HU, where students are taught on a tertiary level) demand a teacher to have a master degree (e.g. bachelor or master program)

HU teaches deaf as well as hearing students as NGT teachers. Hearing students must demonstrate a minimum of level B2 to receive their diploma. The Dutch Sign Centre only trains deaf teachers.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in your country? Are curricula based on the CEFR?

Yes, all organisations (HU, Dutch Sign Centre, Kentalis) work with the CEFR. There has been a collaboration between different organisations in a research group in 2010-2013. After that, the different organisations developed their own programs.

In general, HU teaches at all CEFR levels, other organisations at A1 and A2 levels only.

Assessment of CEFR levels in learners can be done at HU, with an official adaptation of the ASLPI (granted by RIT, Rochester USA) called NGT-FA (NFA for short).

What, in your opinion, is the way forward for sign language teaching & the training of

sign language teachers in your country, and/or in Europe?

Proper training and research into sign language pedagogy. Currently, there is an ECML project, PRO-Sign 2, which endeavours to formulate competencies and standards for SL teachers, in order to improve sign language teachings in the EU at all levels (i.e. diploma courses/university degrees).

Do you have any recommendations that you want to share with us?

At this point in time, it is of the utmost importance to join hands in Europe to raise the standard of sign language teaching. Only through collaboration can we strive to educate excellent SL teachers. These teachers, in turn, can play a decisive role in sign language teaching to both children and adults.

The Deaf communities in the EU should be educated about their own language, and about their language rights.

Projects like SIGNTEACH and PRO-Sign play an important role in disseminating knowledge about the field of Deaf Studies and SL pedagogy.

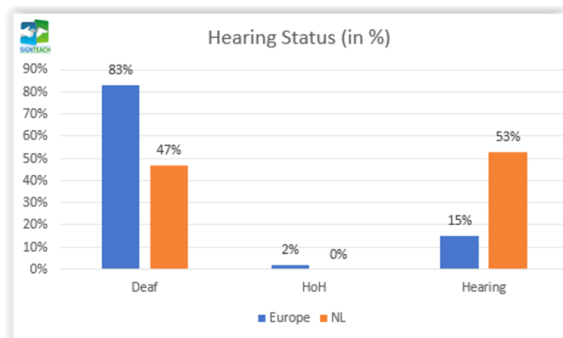
Date of the interview: 23 June 2017

Results SignTeach Survey: NL

Number of respondents

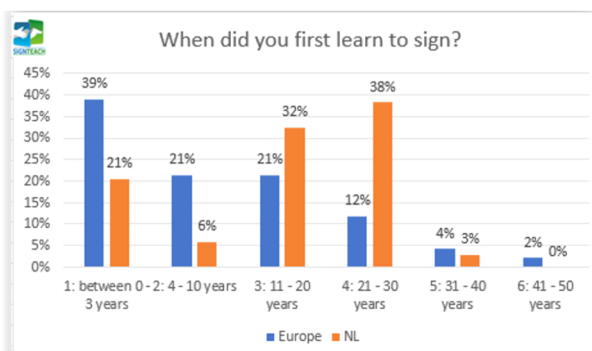
The Netherlands: 34.

Hearing Status



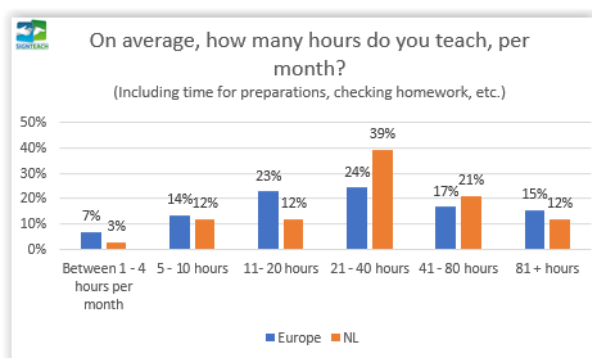
53% of all Dutch respondents (orange) are hearing, versus only 15% of all European respondents (blue).

Native signers?

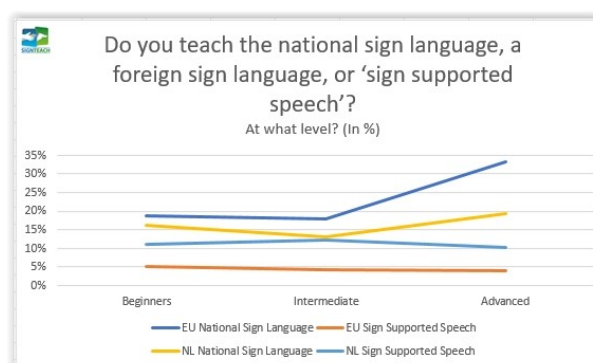


Most of the sign language teachers in the Netherlands learned NGT, the language they teach, as adults as a second/foreign language.

How many hours do you teach, per month?



The respondents teach more hours per month than most of their colleagues in the EU.



What do you teach: the national sign language, a foreign sign language, or 'sign supported speech'?

Compared to their colleagues, sign language teachers in the Netherlands more frequently (also) teach Signed Dutch. At the beginners and intermediate level, they teach Signed Dutch almost as often as they teach the national sign language, NGT.

Open question: Barriers?

“This is a very hard question to answer (so many things can be named here). I think there is a gap between how NGT is used by the deaf community and how we teach NGT at the university. This makes teaching of NGT hard. The lack of good teaching materials is also an issue for me.”

More results can be found on the [SignTeach website](#).

Country Report

5.7 Norway



5.7 Norway

Aud Karin Stangvik, Statped, Trondheim (NO)



History

In Norway there was a deaf person, Andreas Christian Møller, who established the first school for the deaf back in 1825. At this

school, sign language was the language of instruction.

Eventually, several deaf schools were established, and during the late 1800, the discussion came about what was the correct language of instruction: sign language or spoken language?

For a long period, Norwegian sign language was preferred, but eventually Norwegian spoken language was introduced as the language of instruction.

Golden age

In 1985, we had the first parliamentary report that recognizes Norwegian sign language as a language, and the 90s became a golden age for Norwegian sign language and sign language teaching.

Universities established Sign Language Interpreting and Sign Language Studies, deaf children gained their right to sign language education, and parents got the opportunity to attend 40 weeks of sign language training with a new program called "See My Language".

Dedicated curriculum

For elementary school and upper secondary school, deaf students could follow a dedicated curriculum in four subjects, including Norwegian sign language.

In addition, the University College of Sør-Trøndelag offered a study for deaf teacher students studying how to teach Norwegian sign language and the other subjects in a dedicated curriculum. Here, the students were especially qualified to teach Norwegian sign language as a subject.

Ål Folk High School

At the same time, Ål Folk High School and Course Center for the Deaf offered a one-year study program for sign language teachers.

With the development in the 1990s, it was now possible to study and be qualified to teach sign language to different

target groups at different levels. Sign language teachers could study and discuss the pedagogic and didactic aspect of sign language teaching.

Today sign language teachers teach at schools for deaf, in mainstream schools, in colleges and universities, at Signo, Statped, deaf associations and at Ål Folk High School and Course Centre for the Deaf.

Qualifications

However, qualification of sign language teachers and teachers who teach the subject Norwegian sign language has become a neglected area.

The study programmes for the deaf at University College of Sør-Trøndelag and Ål Folk High School were closed down, and in the near future, we will lack qualified sign language teachers.

There is still political will to offer sign language teaching for different target groups. In the light of inclusion, sign language training is not only for deaf children and their parents, but it is now also on the agenda for fellow students, siblings and hearing children of deaf parents.

Paradox

The big paradox then is that we missed the focus on qualifying teachers who can realise the good intentions.

Behind all the good intentions, a true acknowledgement of sign language, and what it takes to teach a language, seems to be missing. Today, we experience that sign language interpreters, assistants and teachers with low-level language skills are set to teach students in sign language.

For years now, the university has tried to establish studies that qualify students to teach sign language. Only in this way can we ensure sign language education and teaching based on a true acknowledgement of sign language as a language. We need qualified teachers to achieve the political intentions.

Learning Resources

Statped develops bilingual learning resources for deaf and hard of hearing children. They develop materials for kindergarten and learning resources for primary and secondary education and training. In addition, they develop learning resources for sign language teaching.

Statped is also responsible for the development of the Norwegian sign language dictionary. The website www.erher.no gives access to all the resources that Statped has developed for the deaf and hard of hearing.





Interview with Torill Ringsø

Assistant Professor, Division of Language and Communication, Signed language and Interpreting, Department of Language and Literature, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU), Trondheim

What, in your opinion, are the strengths / weaknesses of the current system in your country? That is: the current system of teaching sign language and the training of sign language teachers.

The most important weakness is that there is no organised education/training for sign language teachers in Norway.

There are also very few deaf young people who choose to study teaching. Most of the sign language teaching happens in university or university colleges and resource centers, where there is a requirement to have a Masters degree in order to be hired. A strength is that the community is tight knit, so we all know each other and can pull our resources together when we need to.

Can you give us examples of 'best practice' in your country?

When educational institutions work with the deaf community to give sign language learners access to deaf social arenas, for example taking students to the deaf club.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of

sign language teachers, in your country? Is there a (formal, informal) system? Is the system as accessible for deaf teachers as for hearing teachers?

This goes back to question number one. To be hired as a teacher where most of the sign language training goes on, you have to have an MA, in some cases a BA. But again, we need better opportunities to train sign language teachers. Deaf students may enter both teacher programmes and sign language interpreter programmes, and hopefully we'll have more deaf teachers with proper training in the years to come.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in your country? Are curricula based on the CEFR?

There are three ITPs (Interpreter Training Programmes) in Norway, at university and university college level. They are cooperating on developing their curricula, but so far this is not based on the CEFR. However more of the staff are increasingly learning about the CEFR and it will most likely affect future developments.

What, in your opinion, is the way forward, for sign language teaching & the training of sign language teachers in your country, and/or in Europe?

Provision of training for future teachers of signed language at BA and MA-level. We particularly need more deaf sign language teachers, and we must encourage them to enter this exciting field.

Date of the interview: May 2017

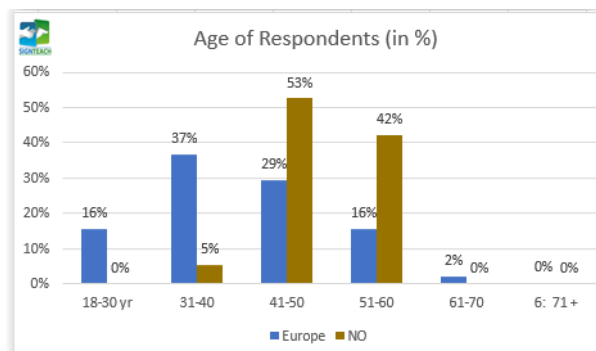


Results SignTeach Survey: NO

Number of respondents

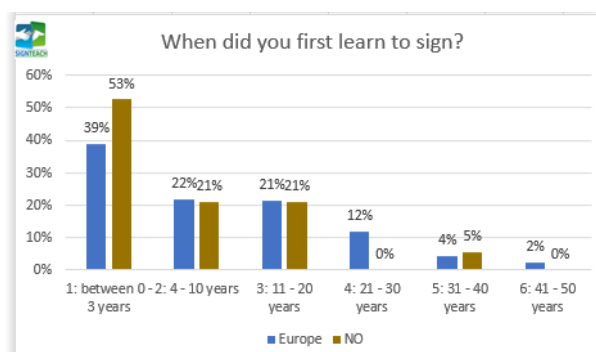
Norway: 19.

Age groups



Compared to their European colleagues, the Norwegian respondents (olive) are somewhat older: almost 90% are over age 40.

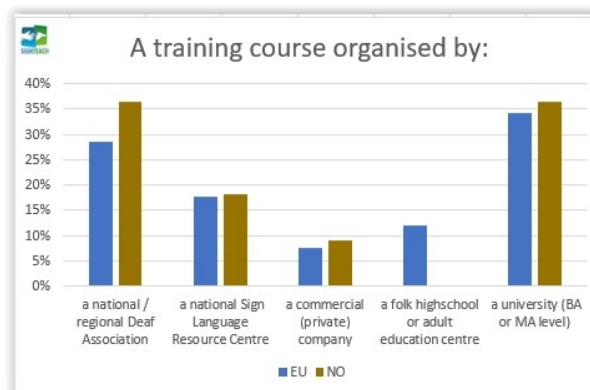
Native signers?



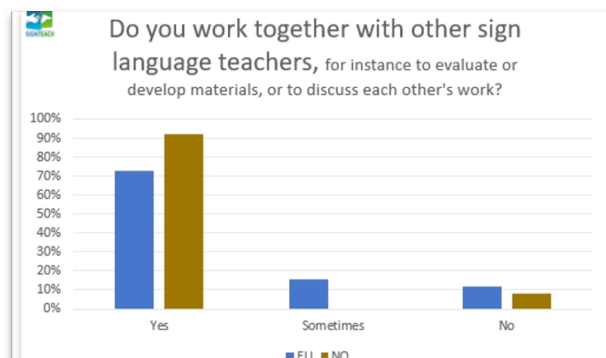
Over 50% of the Norwegian respondents (olive) learned to sign before age 5. Almost no one learned to sign after age 20.

Who organized your training?

Over 80% of the Norwegian respondents have had training in teaching sign language. The training was most often organized by a national or regional Deaf Association or a university.



Do you work together with other sign language teachers?



Over 90% of the Norwegian respondents work together with other sign language teachers.

Open question: Good examples, advice?

“Work with other sign language teachers and have respect for each other's work.”

More results can be found on the [Sign-Teach website](#).

Country Report

5.8 United Kingdom



5.8 United Kingdom

Lynne Barnes, University of Central Lancashire, Preston UK

History

Since British Sign Language (BSL) is an unwritten language, its early history is poorly understood. The very few written records about the use of sign language by the deaf communities in Britain were almost exclusively created by hearing people, but there is solid evidence that deaf people in Britain were signing as early as in the 16th century although most scholars believe that they were signing much earlier.

Thomas Braidwood's 'Braidwood's Academy for Deaf and Dumb' that opened in 1760 is considered to be the first school in Britain to include sign language in education. He introduced the so-called combined system, a form of sign language that set the standards of BSL as we know it today (Sign Community 2003).

Training of Sign Language Teachers

Training courses for those wishing to teach British Sign Language were only introduced in the late 1970s and thus are a comparatively recent innovation in the UK. On the whole, sign language teacher training courses have been provided on a piecemeal basis. In 1984 the British Deaf

Association (BDA) in conjunction with the Department for Health and Social Security initiated the first BSL Tutor Training Agency (BSLTA) in the Deaf Studies Research Unit at the University of Durham. BSLTA then developed the hugely successful deaf-led BSL Tutor Training Course (known as Durham University BSL Teacher training Course [DUBSLTTC]).

This course was taught by deaf people and delivered a practical BSL curriculum, which was underpinned by sign linguistics, the principles of second language learning and teaching practice. This was the first university-based course of its kind, which was soon followed by developments at the University of Bristol and the City Lit (London). Unfortunately, the course at Durham closed in 1999 when the Deaf Studies Research Unit ceased to exist.

There have been a few Specialist BSL Teacher Training Courses since the demise of DUBSLTA, but again these have been relatively short-lived. Between 2004-2005, the University of Bristol developed a BSL teacher training course in conjunction with the BDA and supported by Department of Work and Pensions

funding. This was an initiative to improve employment prospects for profoundly deaf sign language users. Whilst a new curriculum was developed, this course was not accredited, and therefore did not fit within the UK qualifications framework. In 2005 Heriot-Watt University in Scotland developed the Graduate Diploma in Teaching BSL Tutors (ToT). This course was designed specifically for teaching sign language tutors to become trainers of other tutors. This stopped running in 2011.

The University of Central Lancashire (UCLan) instigated a BSL Teacher Training Course (BSLTTC) in 2008. Initially funded by the I-Sign project the course was delivered in BSL by experienced BSL teacher-trainers and incorporated the CTLLS qualification (below), together with a CPD module in Applied Sign Linguistics. By using the accredited teacher training qualifications, BSL Teacher Training was put onto the national qualifications framework. Unfortunately, this course has not run since 2011.

For many potential BSL teachers, the bespoke courses offered at these universities were short-lived, not accessible or feasible. The main path to becoming a sign language teacher was, and still remains, attending mainstream teacher training courses in local Further Educa-

tion colleges (For example, Certificate in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (CTLLS) Diploma in Teaching in the Lifelong Learning Sector (DTLLS) (see www.ifl.ac.uk) and more latterly Level 4 Certificate in Education and Training and Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training. However—these are generic teaching qualifications, not specific to the teaching of BSL.

Curricula, Learning Materials, CEFR

There is no one official curriculum for the teaching of BSL. However, there are national awarding organisations that run training for BSL teachers to teach their qualifications. These awarding organisations have their own curricula, teaching materials and resources. The first of these awarding bodies is Signature (formerly the Council for the Advancement of Communication with Deaf People or CACDP), whose work spans over three and half decades. Over this time, they have expanded and developed into one of the leading national charities in the sector. Their qualifications can be found at <http://www.signature.org.uk/qualification-specifications.php>.

The Institute of British Sign Language (IBSL) is a leading UK awarding organisation providing British Sign Language (BSL)

and other qualifications linked to Deaf Studies. They develop qualifications accredited by Ofqual and can be found at <http://ibsl.org.uk/>.

Whilst these awarding bodies offer BSL-related courses and Ofqual-accredited BSL qualifications, they do not currently include BSL teacher training with formal government Ofqual-accredited qualifications that are nationally recognised by Higher Education and Further Education institutions as pre-requisites for teaching.

There are numerous internet resources which support the teaching of BSL. One of the most successful is BSL:QED (<http://bslqed.com/>) which provides a curriculum guide and resources for the study of BSL at Higher Education level. It was the first curriculum for the teaching of BSL at this level and was guided by the CEFR.

Number of sign language teachers

It is not possible to report the precise number of British Sign Language teachers in the UK. British Sign Language teachers are not regulated and do not have to be registered as a sign language teacher. Training centres and providers have to be registered with the awarding bodies in order to teach the accredited qualifications, but individual teachers are not identified, nor their hearing/deaf status

recorded.

Research

In the UK in 2010 a research project was commissioned to investigate the situation regarding sign language teaching. The project had three main objectives. The first was to gain grass-roots insight into the profession of BSL teaching on a very practical level. The second was to ascertain key barriers to BSL teaching as perceived by practitioners who are actively involved in sign language teaching. The third was to explore sign language teachers' ambitions in terms of their professional development.

The findings of this research were disseminated in a report entitled: *No time? No support? No idea?* (Eichmann & Barnes, 2010). The key findings are summarised below:

- BSL teaching often takes place at inconvenient times and, what is more, for many teachers represents one source of income that needs to be balanced against other jobs held by the individual.
- For the BSL teaching profession to present a genuine career option for deaf sign language using individuals, it needs to be systemically regulated by and supported from within the wider education sector.

The data generated in this research show that clear information regarding career progression pathways (including required information) are not only needed but that these needed to be made available and accessible to (potential) sign language teachers.

Sign Language Legislation

On 18 March, 2003, the Government made a formal statement that it recognised that BSL is a language in its own right (quoting an estimated 70,000 people whose preferred language it is), and promising to invest £1 million in a programme of initiatives to support this statement. This followed 4 years of campaigning and BSL marches through the streets, road blockades and political activity, which brought mainstream media coverage and culminated in 10,000 people marching to Trafalgar Square. However, this was not legislation, only recognition. Campaigners who had hoped this recognition would lead to real change later became disillusioned at its lack of teeth and are now pressing for *legal* recognition.

Scotland

Introduced by Mark Griffin (MSP) to the Scottish Parliament on 30 October 2014, the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015 was passed into law on 17 Sep-

tember and is the first of its kind in the United Kingdom.

The legislation aims to raise awareness of British Sign Language (BSL) and improve access to services for those using the language by requiring the Scottish Government and listed local bodies to publish and implement their own plans for how they will promote the use of the language. This is landmark legislation and could act as a critical step in strengthening the position of the British Sign Language in Scotland. The legislation has the potential to improve and elevate sign language teaching, sign language teacher training, education for deaf children and services for deaf people.



Clark Denmark remembers: Sign Language Teaching in the UK. *Interview by Luigi Lerosé*



Interview (Int. Sign): <https://youtu.be/LRtk97iYNBA>

When did Deaf people begin to teach BSL in the UK?

Before answering when deaf people started teaching BSL in the UK let me give a historical context going further back. There had been teaching of BSL but it had not been by deaf people but rather by hearing people.

Almost always the teacher was someone who worked for the church. Historically Deaf clubs in the UK have been run by hearing members of the clergy. That said they were very proficient sign language users. They were so proficient users of the language that if you didn't know already it would be very difficult to identify whether they were hearing or Deaf based on their use of the language. But deaf people were stopped from running their own Deaf clubs by them.

When did the thinking change and Deaf people start teaching sign language?

Well around the time British Sign Language research became very popular about 1978/9. In America research was happening much earlier but in the UK around that time, deaf people really had an awakening. They realised that what they were using was a real language, their language; it was BSL.

When this change occurred where did you find the deaf people to do the work?

There was a very small pool of deaf people that they could choose from.

The research to that point had mainly been conducted by hearing people. There was one Deaf person who been born and raised in the UK but had moved to the United States to study at Gallaudet University. She knew about sign language research and sign linguistics. After she graduated she stayed in the US working. After some time she decided to return to the UK. The name of that person was Dot Miles. She began sign language teaching in the UK.

What happened next? Did Dot encourage other people to become teachers too?

Oh yes. Dot was unprecedented within

the Deaf community up to that point. We had only had hearing people talk to us about this subject in the past, but now we had a deaf person and she was truly inspirational. The British Deaf Association (BDA) then commissioned Dot to work on assembling a book of photographs of British Sign Language. But this was not just a dictionary of signs but guidelines on how to teach sign language practically to other people. That was the first book of its kind in the UK. That book was created around 1979.

When deaf people came together to be taught how to become teachers of sign language, how were they taught? Was it a workshop style teaching or something else?

It started with the British Deaf Association asking for people who were interested in coming on a workshop and be taught how to teach. On that very first course Dot visited the group and explained to them how her book could be used in the teaching of sign language. This took place around 1981. Make no mistake this was a hugely significant development.

Following this, a new programme appeared on our TV screens which was looking at the lives of deaf people. It was a weekly programme that was broadcast on BBC1 (See Hear) and had huge exposure as it was watched by many hearing



Dorothy Miles, <https://youtu.be/>

people who then bombarded the BBC with requests to learn sign language. The BBC asked the British Deaf Association (BDA) if they had any contacts so that they could refer all these people to sign language courses. The BDA turned to the University of Durham for help, to see if together they could deliver a course. Within 3 years there was a university BSL Teacher Training course and it all went from there.

That teacher training certification then enabled deaf people to go on to work as sign language teachers. That was the first BSL teacher training course within a university setting.

What was the content taught on the course?

The first task was to persuade deaf people to come on the course at university. Many deaf people didn't want to even apply as they felt they didn't have the

qualifications that are required for hearing people to enter a university course. We had to inform deaf people that entry to our courses would be judged by their level of proficiency using BSL, the potential to be a leader, a strong sense of Deaf culture.

language.

The second concept was that of linguistics and an understanding of what that meant in terms of BSL. How to be able to observe others and learn how to teach. Finally, they would pass assessments in teaching skills; once completed they



The first concept we taught was a sense of identity and examining who they were; for too long they had been denied their own identity and had been oppressed by hearing people. Once they could have that sense of who they were they would be able to stand up for themselves. So we wanted to give them that sense of identity and ownership of their

would graduate from the course.

Our first BSL teachers graduated in 1985. The final cohort graduated in 1999 because the university department closed. After 1999 there were different courses delivered in a host of different, often piecemeal ways.

Date of the interview: September 2016





Interview with Emma Iliffe

Chairperson of ABSLTA: The Association of BSL Teachers and Assessors

What, in your opinion, are the strengths and weaknesses (areas of improvement) of the current system of BSL teacher training in the UK?

The current system is weak for the simple reason that the majority of the long-established teacher training courses (such as those run by Bristol University, Durham University, University of Central Lancashire, City Lit), specifically run for BSL teachers have now closed. This is due to a combination of failure of the British government to give legal status to BSL (that would require mandatory provision for BSL classes) plus austerity-driven cuts that has led to higher education budget cuts leading to previous BSL training courses being cut.

While there are still awarding organisations (such as ABC, the Institute of British Sign Language and Signature) that offer BSL-related courses these do not currently include BSL teacher training with formal government OFQUAL-accredited qualifications that are nationally recognised by HE and FE institutions.

As a result, prospective BSL teachers are compelled to attend government-recognised teaching training courses that make no specific reference to the unique challenges of teaching BSL, do not include BSL-using lecturers who understand the language, and do not include BSL curricula that students can subsequently teach.

A large percentage of the current supply of BSL teachers, who qualified in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, is now reaching retirement age which is leading to a shortage of BSL classes to meet local demands.

Alongside this shortage of formally qualified BSL teachers, we are also aware that some unqualified hearing Communication Support Workers with only basic level 1 or 2 signing skills are teaching BSL courses – this is highly inappropriate and also discriminating against deaf BSL Tutors.

Can you give us examples of ‘best practice’ in your country?

The best examples that we can give is historic. At Durham University, in the 1990s, when the School of Deaf Studies there,

made specific provision to use deaf BSL using lecturers to teach deaf BSL using students and deliver a rigorous academic and practical BSL curriculum underpinned by both linguistics and teaching practice.

London's City Lit Institute was another centre of excellence in BSL teacher training that offered OFQUAL-accredited teacher qualifications. Sadly, due to retirements, failure to train a new generation of BSL teacher trainers, and the lack of BSL teacher training courses, this academic rigour and knowledge base is in danger of being lost to future generations.

Another issue is that younger deaf people are frequently discouraged from taking up BSL teacher training due to the fact that rules for claiming benefits can penalise some workers who work part-time at low rates, resulting in some younger deaf people finding it more economical to live off benefits than train as a tutor.

The resulting vacuum in formally trained and qualified BSL teachers has led to Communication Support Workers and BSL interpreters taking advantage of a gap in the market to deliver BSL courses themselves - which undermines deaf BSL teachers.

Given this, there is an urgent need for a

mandatory register of qualified and accredited BSL teachers in order to prevent the use of unqualified cowboy BSL teachers.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers in the UK?

Ideally, a BSL teacher will have proficiency in BSL up to at least Level 3. After they would then seek a generic teaching qualification at a higher education or skills institute to a minimum Level 3 Award (QCF) to a maximum Level 5 Diploma in Education and Training (QCF)

There are also earlier qualifications with names such as DTLLS, CTLLS, PTLLS or 7407 or stage 3, amongst others. The qualifications in the FE sector have gone through various periods of reform and these are the earlier versions, which are generally not available now but still have relevance where older BSL teachers are teaching classes.

Unfortunately, as noted above, there is no mandatory register to enforce that sign language teachers are properly accredited.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in the UK? Are curricula for training sign language teachers based on the CEFR?

The awarding body Signature is currently responsible for curriculum development

for BSL Levels 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 (There is no level 5) and for recruiting the BSL assessors who assess these.

These levels are based on earlier pre-CEFR standards, using NVQ UK Occupational Language Standards (dating from 2010) at Levels 1, 2, 3,4 and 6.

The Institute of BSL has also produced its own Levels 1, 2 and 3 BSL curriculum and qualifications. However, these are still awaiting formal accreditation by the UK Skills Agency. (<http://ibsl.org.uk/qualifications/#intro-to-qualifications>)

What, in your opinion, is the way forward for sign language teaching and the training of sign language teachers in the UK and in Europe?

A BSL Act that introduces mandatory funding in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland for a centrally-funded deaf-led UK agency that oversees BSL curriculum development, nationally accredited and recognised teacher training qualifications, assessors and registration of BSL teachers.

Date of the interview: April 2017





Interview with Sarah Lawrence

Sarah Lawrence is Deaf, a fluent signer of BSL from Cardiff. She is a successful business woman and owns 'Deaf-Friendly Solutions', an in-service training business for deaf and hearing organisations.

What, in your opinion, are the strengths and weaknesses of the current system of BSL teacher training in the UK?

For some years now, I have found myself having to repair poor signing skills from Level 1 and Level 2 classes. The main reasons behind this :

- the lack of effective teaching of the basic linguistic rules of BSL at those levels; and
- a lack of teaching passion to teach the language properly.

Training for BSL teachers is scarce, and even where it is available, too much of those events concentrate on talking down to deaf teachers and telling them about the process of teaching rather than a focus on the outcome and student learning.

Current teaching provision is usually offered by people who have little or no experience of teaching the introductory levels, where knowledge and application of the basics is essential to the use of BSL

and higher level learning. Passion for the maintenance of BSL standards is definitely missing in some of the more influential trainers, and that is slowly undermining the BSL teaching framework across the UK. Friends using friends to put on training events, means that the skills and knowledge of some of the most passionate and accomplished BSL teachers in the UK are wasted.

Those courses that are offered are also expensive for self employed deaf teachers with smaller numbers of students. It represents quite a significant overhead. If we are to get serious about helping qualified deaf teachers to teach and run courses, we need to make sure the courses that are run are affordable and not run for profit.

Can you give us examples of 'best practice' in your country?

This is a tough one, because of the reasons above. Training content has been stale and stagnant for some time, with too little critical thinking about past events and creative thinking about how BSL teaching can be improved. The

teaching community see an invasion of hearing teachers with low levels of BSL and virtually no linguistic knowledge offering courses, but we do nothing to develop the next breed of deaf teachers and look at new methods to teach.

There are no national resources as you would get with Geography/French/Psychology for example, and nothing in the training events that are held, seeks to change that. Best practice in the UK in my opinion, is limited to teaching practices themselves, not the teaching of the teachers. I also consider this to be a worsening position in the UK, not an improving one.

Can you tell us about the accreditation of sign language teachers in the UK?

The problem is that teaching of BSL is unregulated, so virtually anyone can offer to run BSL courses. Teachers in colleges and universities have to be qualified teachers and are subject to the requirement of obtaining CPD, private providers under the registration of the two awarding bodies, do not need to show qualification status or continued fitness to teach.

The process for regulation is far too woolly and driven primarily by income, not by the maintenance of teaching standards. For the conscientious, committed and fully qualified deaf BSL teachers, the will-

ingness to register virtually anyone to teach based on a paper application, is highly damaging.

Can you tell us something about curriculum development in the UK? Are curricula for training sign language teachers based on the CEFR?

The curriculum has remained virtually the same for many years. I believe when first set, it would have complied with the CEFR and probably still does.

The primary comprehensive teaching resource has been in existence for many years, and little has changed. If there is a link made between providers of training courses for BSL teachers and the CEFR, it is not made obvious to delegates and



none of the paperwork makes any reference to a link being made. To save our language and instill good teaching and training practices, I believe there is urgent need to professionalise the administration that sits behind BSL.

What, in your opinion, is the way forward for sign language teaching and the training of sign language teachers in the UK and in Europe?

I believe there has to be a far greater focus on standards in respect of training for teachers and teaching itself. This should be underpinned by far greater knowledge and understanding of BSL linguistics, with every teacher and trainer needing to be qualified in linguistics to be able to teach/train.

The BSL teaching community needs to be empowered so that best practices can flourish, with a renewed national focus of all interested bodies concentrating on standards of BSL, and signing outcomes of students.

There is far too great a focus on paperwork and written assessments, with many students able to try practical signing assessments time and again until they finally record one they are happy with.

There needs to be in place something that protects and promotes high standards of BSL, so that it is akin to teaching a

modern foreign language, not just how people talk in English, French, Italian etc. when down the pub or at a rugby club.

Any national process of ownership of the standards involving oversight and influence over the teaching of BSL needs to be removed from the pursuit of income, so that decision making is not influenced by monetary considerations.

Arrogance, selfishness, exploitative attitudes and the pursuit of power, does nothing to help BSL teachers or the maintenance of teaching standards of BSL.

We need a cradle to grave national/international framework that identifies talent and provides an affordable and deaf friendly development pathway for deaf teachers from the first day on their road to being a qualified teaching/trainer to the time they retire.

The quality of future training should be underpinned by qualification and continuous professional development, and access to all of this should not be restricted by cost.

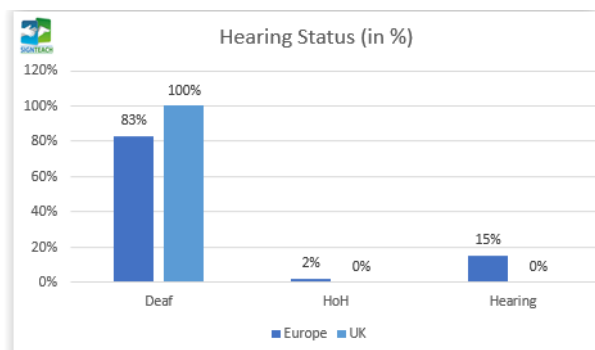
Date of the interview: April 2017

Results SignTeach Survey: UK

Number of respondents

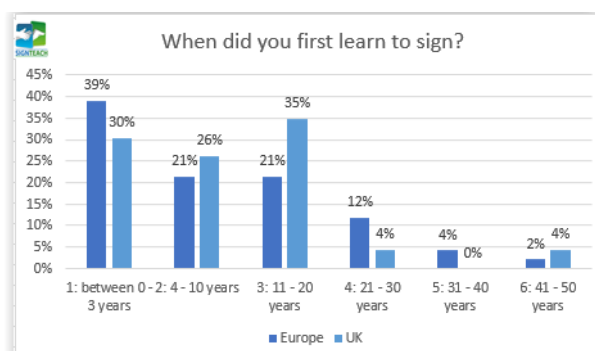
24.

Hearing Status



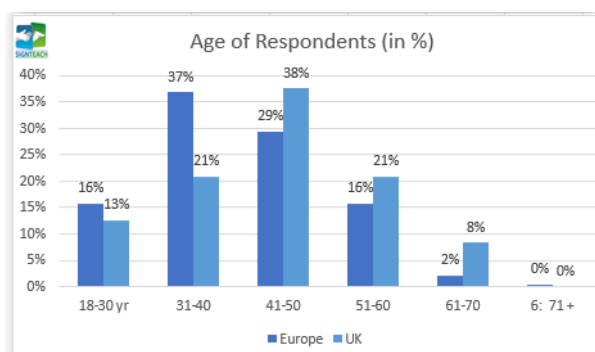
All of the UK respondents (light blue) are deaf.

Native signers?



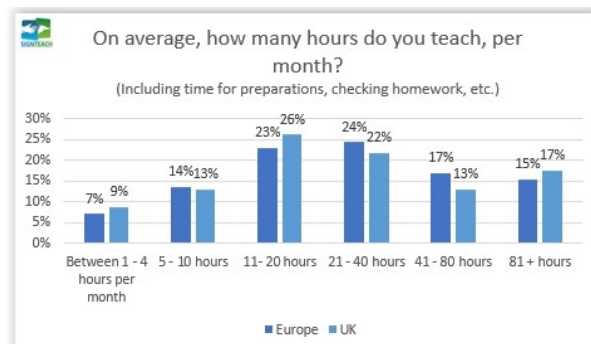
70% of the UK respondents learned to sign after age 3, but almost all before age 20.

Age?



Compared to their colleagues across Europe, UK BSL teachers (light blue) are older, almost 70% are 40 or older.

On average, how many hours do you teach per month?



Like their colleagues, most BSL teachers do not work fulltime.

Open question: Good examples, advice?

“Sign Language teachers should have opportunities to work together, to discuss many issues, and to attend some seminars, courses or conferences for professional developments. we also need an online resource centre to share our teaching experiences and outcomes with examples, exchange teaching materials, do some teacher exchange activities, and to support each other.”

Open question: Barriers?

“Due cutback and zero hours contract.”

“Sometimes different cultures have different signs which they find is not suitable due to their religions”

More results can be found on the [SignTeach website](#).



6. Conclusions & Recommendations



In the country reports, you have read about the history of sign language teaching in Europe. The interviews with the experts and the results of the SignTeach Survey give useful insights into the present situation. Of course, what we are really interested in, is the future. All people who we consulted told us about their concerns for the future. But can we agree on a ‘roadmap’ so that we all go in the same, right direction?

First, a bird’s eye view of sign languages and sign language teaching through the ages. Where do we come from? We all seem to be travelling the same road, although some countries travel faster than others.

1. Sign languages, deaf-owned ‘undiscovered’ languages

Until not so very long ago, sign languages were used within small and larger communities of deaf people for everyday communication. Hearing family members learned sign language from their deaf relatives, deaf children acquired sign language informally from deaf peers and deaf adults. Sign languages were not formally taught as first or foreign

languages, they were not studied or described. They were ‘owned’ by the users - people who were deaf from birth - and ignored, looked down upon or plainly invisible to everyone outside of the Deaf community.

2. Sign languages: a hearing owned communication ‘tool’

Then hearing people, usually the clergy wanting to save deaf ‘souls’, became involved. They used signs as a communication tool to reach and teach deaf people. They looked at signs from a hearing perspective: a tool to communicate with deaf people, a tool to teach deaf people to read and write the spoken language, and maybe to speak and lipread. A tool to make deaf people and sign languages fit the hearing moulds that were current at the time.

Teachers were ignorant of the syntax and grammar of the sign language as it was used by deaf people amongst themselves. Some hearing teachers developed their own sign ‘systems’ to match the hearing language – at word-level, and sometimes even at the level of morphemes. Literally ignoring the meaning of the word *and* the existing sign lan-

guage lexicon. The word ‘butterfly’ for instance would be signed as two signs: BUTTER + FLY = flying butter! The word ‘understand’: UNDER + STAND = standing under! These examples are often quoted to show how ridiculous these attempts were, and how naïve (and patronizing) the persons who designed these systems. In the country reports, several authors mention ‘sign supported speech (Signed English, Signed German, Sign Supported Dutch, etc.). These sign supported speech systems are less extreme examples of how the lexicon of sign languages is used as a ‘tool’ to communicate with deaf people and to teach them the spoken language.

3. Sign languages: deaf-owned languages, discovered and charted by linguists

Hearing linguists, starting with Bernard Tervoort and William C. Stokoe discovered the sign languages used within deaf communities and from the 1950’s on began to describe and study these languages as true explorers. They respected sign languages and sign language users. They didn’t try to change or ‘improve’ sign language, but employed native deaf sign language users as informants. Slowly but surely, sign languages became visible and respected as equal to spoken languages.

Sign language interpreter became a paid profession. Before, family members of deaf people had interpreted informally; now, interpreting required proper training, accreditation and registration.

Proper training, usually by hearing and deaf teachers, teaching in tandem. Deaf people taught communication and everyday language use, hearing people taught linguistics, ethics, and other theoretical subjects. In many countries, deaf native signers did not – do not – have the qualifications required to teach at higher level education. They were employed as teaching assistants, or some other way was found to bypass the missing qualifications.

Universities started to research, then teach sign linguistics. At first by hearing researchers, but slowly but surely also by deaf researchers. Sign languages became a respectable research subject. Deaf sign language users became teachers, researchers, and interpreters, equal to their hearing colleagues.

4. Sign languages: a ‘reasonable accommodation’ for deaf people, but at the same time: languages in their own right.

In most countries of Europe, sign languages are now seen as equal to spoken languages. Maybe not by law, but in practice they are treated as minority lan-

guages, equal to spoken minority languages. Used on television, in courts, at universities. Treated as ‘reasonable accommodation’ whenever accessibility is at stake, but also taught at all levels of education to people who are interested in sign languages in their own right.

More and more often, taught by teachers who now have to meet mainstream qualification and accreditation criteria for teaching languages.

Sign language curricula now follow mainstream developments and are being rewritten to fit the CEFR, with its focus on communication instead of (or in addition to) grammar and syntax.

Quality standards for sign language teachers, accreditation and registration, CPD (continuous professional development) are recommended by many of the people who we consulted.

All is well?

So all is well? No. As this report shows, all is not well. We are in the middle of a process of change:

1. The status of sign languages has changed. Sign languages have joined the mainstream and are now comparable to spoken minority languages. If not (yet) by law, then in daily practice. If not now, then soon. Sign languages are no longer the ‘private’ property of the Deaf community.

2. The market for sign language teaching has changed. Fewer parents and teachers of deaf children learn to sign, whereas the general public and hearing students become more and more interested. Like sign languages, sign language teaching has joined the mainstream. As a result, the requirements for sign language teachers have changed. If not (yet) by law, then in daily practice.

However, sign language teachers – again, in general - have NOT changed. In many European countries, the majority of the sign language teachers are 40+, they have been teaching sign language (in the same way?) for decades.

They find it difficult to meet the needs of the new target groups, of meeting the requirements of mainstream education.

In most European countries, few young deaf people are interested in becoming a sign language teacher. Deaf sign language teachers have NOT joined the mainstream. Yet.

Because of the ‘mainstreaming’ of sign languages and sign language teaching, more and more often sign languages are taught at a remove from the deaf community and deaf culture. Teachers may be hearing people who learned sign language as a foreign language. The sign language that is taught may be a ‘standardized’ or ‘sanitized’ version of sign language—instead of what Andreas

Costrau (page 64) calls the BIO version of sign language.

The way forward?

Many people who we consulted expressed their concerns. This is the first step, to be aware that all is not well, that action is needed. Fortunately, most people who we consulted, agree on the way forward:

- We need quality standards, accreditation, and registration of sign language teachers equal to what is required for teachers of spoken languages in each of our countries.
- We need training options for sign language teachers, both initial training and CPD, similar to what is available to teachers of spoken languages in each of our countries.
- We need payment and career opportunities for sign language teachers, equal to what is available to teachers of spoken languages in

each of our countries.

In short: sign languages teachers and the training of sign language teachers, must become mainstream, too. Even though mainstreaming may have unwanted side effects, there is no way back.

Advocates & Watchdogs

Therefore, we also very much need advocates & watchdogs.

Advocates: sign language users, teachers, researchers who show the mainstream the added value of sign languages for language teaching, for research, for life.

&

Watchdogs: sign language users, sign language teachers, sign language researchers who make sure that joining the mainstream does NOT result in submersion, or in diluting what is unique to sign languages, to sign language users, to sign language teachers.

Equal yes, but different too.



Recommendations

We wrote this report for policymakers. Policymakers at EU level, but also at national level. At the last consortium meeting of the SignTeach consortium, partners discussed recommendations. What can policymakers do, to promote and support sign languages and sign language learning in Europe, in the EU member states?

We looked at recommendations of earlier projects and initiatives. Many of those are still valid! We could have ended this report with many pages filled with recommendations of earlier projects and experts! Instead, we posted them on a website: www.signlanguagewatch.eu.

We also came up with recommendations of our own. The list kept growing, and growing.

But we are teachers. We *know* that policymakers are busy, have little time and short attention spans. We *know* that long lists are not effective.

So instead, we present you with just one recommendation—or maybe it is a request.

Easy to remember, just 3 words that you can use, always and everywhere.

Whenever you say or write anything about languages – policy, planning, rights, teaching, legislation, learning, funding, never mind what –

ALWAYS ALWAYS add:

... include SIGN LANGUAGES!

German? Include German Sign Language. Portuguese? Include Portuguese Sign Language, etc.

Language learning?

... Include SIGN LANGUAGES!

Language teaching?

... include SIGN LANGUAGES!

Language policy?

... Include SIGN LANGUAGES!



Say it to yourself, or better yet, say it out loud.

Add a note or correction to each text or

memorandum about languages

that you are asked to review, approve or sign:

... include SIGN LANGUAGES!

Please repeat? Please remember?

***... include
SIGN LANGUAGES!***





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- KU Leuven, Antwerpen**
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