

<b>Institution:</b> Heriot-Watt University		
<b>Unit of Assessment:</b> D25 Area Studies		
<b>Title of case study:</b> Increasing participation, access, and inclusion for signing deaf communities		
<b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> September 2005 – present		
<b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>		
<b>Name(s):</b>	<b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>	<b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b>
Prof Jemina Napier	Professor of Intercultural Communication	2013 – present
Prof Graham H. Turner	Professor of Translation & Interpreting Studies	2005 – present
Dr Annelies Kusters	Associate Professor in Sign Language and Intercultural Research	2017 – present
Dr Robert Adam	Assistant Professor in BSL	2020 – present
Dr Jordan Fenlon	Assistant Professor in BSL	2016 – 2019
Dr Stacey Webb	Assistant Professor in Sign Language Studies	2015 – present
Dr Svenja Wurm	Assistant Professor in BSL, translating & interpreting	2012 – present
Gary Quinn	Assistant Professor in BSL	2005 – present
<b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> June 2015 – December 2020		
<b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> N		
<b>1. Summary of the impact</b>  <p>Heriot-Watt University conducts research on sign language use, policy, and access. Our global impact re-positions signing in public life, enabling 70,000,000 deaf signers to participate in, and have access to, an inclusive society in various contexts. Our research: shaped policy on professional services and education in Scotland, the UK and Uganda; led to frameworks for teaching British Sign Language (BSL) in schools; and informed law reform allowing signers to serve as jurors in Australia and Ireland. Our guidelines improve signers' access to services and information by raising the quality of professional sign language translation and interpreting (SLTI) provision worldwide.</p>		
<b>2. Underpinning research</b>  <p>As a consequence of sign languages being recognised as languages in their own right, this has re-positioned signing as an integrative part of public life and an inclusive society. Although sign languages have now been legally recognised in 50 countries, there has been a dearth of clear, evidence-based guidelines for teaching sign language and interpreting, and SLTI best practices, and a lack of recognition of the role signers can play in public life. Heriot-Watt research evidence has raised the profile of sign languages. Heriot-Watt has promoted the interests of signers</p>		

worldwide through our research in applied sign linguistics and deaf studies internationally [3.1], across three main themes: (i) understanding how sign languages are used authentically in diverse communities and contexts and therefore can be taught and learned; (ii) repositioning how signers can participate in public life by influencing changes in policy and legislation; and (iii) promoting access for signers in an inclusive society through professional, high quality SLTI services.

(i) Our studies examine how signers interact in everyday contexts, showing, for example, varieties of BSL used in conversation (funded by AHRC 2016-2020, ESRC 2017-2019), and how signers use multimodal strategies in international sign language interactions encounters [3.2, 3.3] (continuing work funded by ERC 2017-2022). These studies change understandings of sign language structure, variation, and usage. This new fundamental knowledge enabled us to consider sign language use in environments such as television (AHRC funded study 2018-2019), bilingual theatre productions [3.4] and mainstream classrooms [3.5]. Building on our earlier publications concerning the need for sign language planning [3.6], these projects have evidenced how BSL can be taught and learned, shaping guidance for schools (Scottish Universities Insight Institute (SUII)- funded 2015-2016) leading to development of new SQA level 3 & 4 awards (<https://www.sqa.org.uk/sqa/90358.html>) and university training of SLTI students in the UK (AHRC funded 2019-2020) and Uganda (BA funded 2018-2019). This applied understanding of sign language use and teaching means that the skills people acquire in classrooms affect their experiences when signing in all situations for the rest of their lives.

(ii) We re-positioned signing in public life in two settings: politics and justice. Firstly, our empirical research demonstrated that deaf citizens can participate in, and have access to, political institutions (European Commission funded 2014), which led to a later project in collaboration with the Scottish parliament exploring what a signing parliament might look like (SUII funded 2019). Secondly, a research programme of four linked projects examined the feasibility of signers participating in jury service with sign language interpreters (funded by the Australian Research Council 2012-2016). This led to law reform in Australia and Ireland.

(iii) We collaborated with key stakeholders including the British Deaf Association (BDA), Police Scotland, SignVideo and the Association of Sign Language Interpreters UK (ASLI) on studies to promote access through face-to-face and video-mediated SLTI in four domains: employment (funded European Commission 2017-2019, AHRC 2015-2016 & 2018), democracy (European Commission funded 2014), law (funded European Commission 2013-2016, AHRC (SGSAH) 2016-2019, ScotGov 2017-2019) and health (ScotGov funded 2017-2019). Evidence of interpreting-in-practice and stakeholder perceptions of SLTI in these domains enabled us to extend our theoretical understanding of interpreter-mediated communication in different contexts and define best practices.

### 3. References to the research

[3.1] Napier, J & Leeson, L 2016, *Sign Language in Action*. Research and Practice in Applied Linguistics, 1 edn, Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137309778>

[3.2] Kusters, A, Spotti, M, Swanwick, R & Tapio, E 2017, 'Beyond languages, beyond modalities: transforming the study of semiotic repertoires', *International Journal of Multilingualism*, vol. 14, no. 3, pp. 219-232. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14790718.2017.1321651>

[3.3] Napier, J & Rosenstock, R 2016, *International Sign: Linguistics, Usage and Status*. Sociolinguistics in Deaf Communities Series, vol. 21, Gallaudet University Press.

[3.4] Pfeiffer, K, Richardson, M & Wurm, S 2020, 'Translaboration in the Rehearsal Room: Translanguaging as Collaborative Responsibility in Bilingual Devised Theatre', *Target - International Journal of Translation Studies*, vol. 32, no. 2, pp. 358-379.  
<https://doi.org/10.1075/target.20061.pfe>

[3.5] Cameron, AM, O'Neill, R & Quinn, G 2017, Deaf Students Using Sign Language in Mainstream Science Classrooms. in AW Oliveira & MH Weinburgh (eds), *Science Teacher Preparation in Content-Based Second Language Acquisition*. Springer International Publishing, pp. 341-360.

[3.6] Turner, GH 2009, 'Sign language planning: Pragmatism, pessimism and principles', *Current Issues in Language Planning*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 243-254.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14664200903162505>

#### 4. Details of the impact

Our underpinning research has shaped policy and standards and had an impact on education which has led to greater participation of, and access and inclusion for, signers. The impact of this work has been recognised through awards [5.1, 5.2].

##### Impact on Policies and Standards

Demand for Heriot-Watt's expertise in relation to public policy is international. Napier and Adam were co-leaders of the World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and WASLI Task Force to develop an accreditation system for International Sign interpreters to work at the United Nations and European institutions, which was established in 2015 and has led to the accreditation of 30 deaf and hearing IS interpreters worldwide [5.4]. Kusters, Napier and Adam draw on their research to contribute as members to the WFD expert groups on *developing countries*, *accessibility* and *sign language and deaf studies* respectively and have contributed to writing several policy documents that have provided guidelines on employing and accrediting interpreters, the use of signing avatars and the political identity status of signers [5.5]. Napier and Turner gave evidence to the International Telecommunications Union leading to specific policy recommendations on sign language video interpreted calls [5.6].

Our work with deaf jurors was used in evidence to members of parliament, policy officers, legal personnel and disability commissioners in Australia, Ireland and the UK, which has led to changes to Juries Acts in Ireland and Australia allowing deaf people to serve as jurors with sign language interpreters – a significant difference to deaf citizenship [5.7]. Two deaf people have since served as jurors in Ireland in December 2017 and September 2020. Furthermore, the Australian Judicial Council on Cultural Diversity's Recommended National Standards for Working with Interpreters in Courts and Tribunals (2017) and reports of the Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities for the UK (2017) and Australia (2019) now mention provision for deaf jurors. In addition, the Scottish Government Justice Sector Working Group and the Ministry of Justice are considering implementing corresponding changes at Scottish and UK levels respectively.

Our research also underpins Scottish and UK policy discussions, with international best practice informing standards and practices locally. Our research was influential in achieving the British Sign Language (Scotland) Act 2015. The team were invited to give evidence to various committees to shape the Bill and have led a number of Scottish Parliament forums that contribute to defining BSL's future in an inclusive Scotland [5.3]. We play a key role as one of two academic members in the UK Council on Deafness Special Interest Group currently drafting proposals for a BSL Bill to be put before the UK Parliament, and have advised the Cyber Resilience Unit of Scottish Government about risks relating to 'accessible formats' and cyber security.

We collectively provided significant input to the Scottish Government's BSL/English interpreting landscape review (2019), which feeds into actions as part of the BSL National Plan. Based on our identification of best practices in SLTI in the domains of law, we have given input to ASLI (2015), the Scottish Criminal Justice Working Group on Interpreting & Translation (2016), the English National Police Chief's Council (2016), and the Advocate's Gateway (2017) on various toolkits, codes of practice and best practice guidelines, which provided an evidence-base for interpreters and legal professionals to work together.

### **Impact on Education and Professional Development**

Our research to understand the structure and usage of BSL led to commitments in the BSL National Plan and new awards from the Scottish Qualifications Authority (from 2018), framing expectations for teaching BSL in schools and establishing a pathway for BSL to be offered as a language subject in primary and secondary schools across Scotland [5.8]. Also, as a result of the above research, a BSL GCSE is being developed along the same guidelines with input from the Heriot-Watt team, which could make this qualification available to thousands of school children. This significantly raises the status of BSL: deaf and hearing schoolchildren will be able to be accredited in BSL alongside other modern languages, providing a pathway for people wanting to work with signers in key professions.

The team worked with police forces in Scotland [5.9] and Manchester to develop training for officers working with sign language interpreters and delivered training through the UK National Register for Communication Professionals with Deaf People, ASLI, Australian Sign Language Interpreters Association, the Sign Language Interpreting Service in Dublin and the Flemish Sign Language Interpreters Association leading to enhanced best practices in SLTI, which improves quality of participation, access and inclusion for signers. New best practice guidelines developed by WASLI [5.4] and ASLI [5.10] enhanced the professional standing for 25,000-30,000 SLTI practitioners worldwide. This professionalisation ensures higher quality standards of access and more inclusion for signers who can live better lives as a consequence.

### **5. Sources to corroborate the impact**

[5.1] Guardian University Social and Community impact award 2017

[5.2] European Commission's European Language Label 2017 award for the Justisign project on police interpreting (<https://vimeo.com/233649027>).

[5.3] Evidence of Professor Turner's contribution to shaping the BSL (Scotland) Bill and subsequent Act (2015) (p73, p109, p118).

[5.4] Letter from President of the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters acknowledging the input from Heriot-Watt experts to developing the new accreditation system for International Sign interpreters

[5.5] Letter from President of the World Federation of the Deaf acknowledging the input from Heriot-Watt experts to their expert groups and several position papers, policies and statements.

[5.6] Meeting report from the International Telecommunications Union SG16/Q26 (Study Group Question 26) (2015) in relation to production guidelines for sign Language services (<https://www.itu.int/md/T13-IPTV.GSI-141006-TD-GEN-0148/en>).

[5.7] Letter from Chief Executive Officer of Deaf Australia testifying to the significance of the deaf juror research led by Professor Napier for signing deaf Australians to be able to participate in civic duty.

[5.8] Letter from Scottish Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills acknowledging Professor Turner's work on BSL teaching and SQA.

[5.9] Justisigns Project Impact Video, featuring interviews with Constable Stephanie Rose, Safer Communities Unit at Police Scotland (clip1) and Terry Riley (late) Chair of the British Deaf Association (clip2) confirming the value of our collaborative partnerships and impact from the project: <https://vimeo.com/176863886> 02.33>04.40 mins and 10.51>11.23 mins.

[5.10] Letter from Chair of the Association of Sign Language Interpreters UK outlining collaborations on projects and Heriot-Watt's input to the development of best practice guidelines: <https://asli.org.uk/asli-best-practice-documents>