

## ACCESS TO THE HEARING WORLD

### **Introduction**

This exhibition focuses on access for deaf people. In particular it highlights how in the past, deaf people were denied access to the hearing world; there was no independent interpreting profession. In the past deaf people had to rely on family members, Missioners, Welfare Officers, and Social Workers to provide paternalistic support. The advent of the interpreting profession (1970s to the present day) improved independence and broke down some of the barriers for deaf people. Presently new technologies are improving and increasing avenues to access. These technological advances are no doubt going to continue to widen access for deaf people in the future. It remains to be seen if this technology will be a boon or a burden.



Lecture with a BSL interpreter – Photo by UCLan



Deaf person with a missionary  
Photo by Mark Heaton

### **The Past**

In the past, access to the hearing world was limited. Deaf people relied on written notes or family members as aids to communication. Deaf clubs which played a huge role in deaf people's lives during 1940s-70s became Missions for the Deaf (Ladd, 2003) and paternalistic 'Missioners' or Welfare Officers began interpreting for deaf people – specifically dealing with general welfare problems (McGilp, 1999). Welfare was something to be done to and for deaf people, rather than being seen as a means for developing the potential of deaf people. More often than not, deaf people relied upon family members to interpret; often their hearing children, who became their bridge to the hearing world (Preston, 1992).

*"I left school in 1969. I had absolutely no access to employment. It was truly awful. So, in the face of the barriers to employment I felt I had to go to college and do a course. The level of support at college was again absolutely nothing at all. Again, it was awful and I really struggled... [...] 20 years I worked there and at union meetings, I had no interpreters, no access. Next thing I know is we were going on strike and I had no knowledge of why. Was it low pay? I just wanted information but instead I was given none. I just had to follow the people in front of me when they walked out of the building."*

(Mark Heaton)

*"Back in the day if I wanted an interpreter, I would use the Welfare Officer. But when the Welfare Officer disappeared it was difficult to find anyone to interpret for me. Sometimes I asked my Mum to come along with me and interpret for me."*

(Ian Smith)

*"It was really difficult in the work environment because often I had no idea what was going on. I knew that I was missing a lot of information. We would have to revert to writing things down on paper, but they didn't like having to do it."*

(Chris Steel)

*"I worked in a hearing company for 22 years and I had absolutely no access to information in all that time. I would have to lip read as best I could. The first time I ever used an interpreter was when I started working for the BDA and I remember at the time thinking, 'What is an interpreter?' I had no idea."*

(Peter Jackson)