



CENTRE FOR DEAF STUDIES

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# *Sign on Europe*

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A Study of Deaf People and Sign Language in the  
European Union

A study in 17 countries, carried out upon request of  
the European Union of the Deaf



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A Research Project on  
The Status of Sign Language in Europe

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carried out upon request of the  
European Union of the Deaf  
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and the European Commission DGV E3

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# Table of Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....	VII
<b>SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>1</b>
DEAF PEOPLE .....	2
ORGANISATIONS .....	2
HEARING INDIVIDUALS .....	3
COMPARISONS .....	3
<b>UNDERSTANDING DEAFNESS AND SIGN LANGUAGE .....</b>	<b>5</b>
BACKGROUND .....	5
THE PRIMARY ISSUES .....	5
TWO LANGUAGES .....	6
A VIEW OF DEAFNESS .....	7
AREAS OF GROWTH AND CHANGE .....	8
<i>Deaf Roles in Research</i> .....	9
<i>Integration</i> .....	9
<i>Interventions</i> .....	9
<i>Video Information</i> .....	10
<i>Mental Health Difficulties</i> .....	10
THE FUTURE .....	11
<b>DEAF COMMUNITY AND CULTURE .....</b>	<b>12</b>
WHAT WE KNOW ALREADY .....	12
THE DEAF COMMUNITY .....	12
DEAF PEOPLE AT WORK .....	13
<i>Satisfaction at Work</i> .....	13
<i>Jobs Deaf People can do</i> .....	13
<i>Bias in the Workplace</i> .....	14
EDUCATION .....	14
SIGN LANGUAGE .....	15
DEAF CULTURAL LIFE .....	16
<i>Cultural Identity</i> .....	17
<i>Deafness-Hearingness</i> .....	17
HOW MANY DEAF PEOPLE? .....	17
<i>Searching for Statistics in Europe</i> .....	17
<b>THE STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGE .....</b>	<b>19</b>
RESEARCH .....	19
<i>People influence language and language use</i> .....	20
<i>Language influences people</i> .....	21
<i>Society and language influence each other</i> .....	21
<i>Neither interact with each other or influence each other</i> .....	21
<i>Attitudes to languages and varieties of a language</i> .....	22
<i>Language planning</i> .....	22
<i>Standardisation</i> .....	23
<i>Understanding the situation of sign language</i> .....	23
<b>METHOD FOR THE STUDY .....</b>	<b>25</b>
THE SAMPLE POPULATIONS .....	25
<i>Deaf People</i> .....	25
<i>Institutions</i> .....	26
<i>Hearing individuals</i> .....	27

PROCEDURE.....	28
<i>Preparatory Work</i> .....	28
<i>Project Work</i> .....	29
<i>a: contacts with researchers</i> .....	29
<i>b: contacts with NCs</i> .....	29
<i>c: pilot work in Bristol</i> .....	29
<i>d: questionnaires and plans</i> .....	29
<i>e: translations</i> .....	30
<i>e: workshop</i> .....	30
SCHEDULE.....	31
<i>Data Processing</i> .....	31
<b>THE PARTICIPANTS.....</b>	<b>33</b>
THE PLANNED SAMPLE.....	33
<i>Deaf Respondents</i> .....	35
RESPONSES FROM INSTITUTIONS.....	38
RESPONSES FROM HEARING INDIVIDUALS .....	39
<b>DEAF VIEWS .....</b>	<b>42</b>
PERSPECTIVES FROM THE INTERVIEWS WITH DEAF PEOPLE .....	42
GENERAL POINTS .....	42
DEAF PEOPLE'S COMMUNICATION .....	43
SIGNING IN SCHOOL .....	46
SIGNING EXPERIENCE.....	49
USE OF SIGN LANGUAGE .....	51
PATTERNS OF LANGUAGE USE.....	52
THE STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGE.....	55
ASPIRATIONS FOR THE FUTURE .....	59
KNOWLEDGE OF SIGN LANGUAGE .....	61
CONCLUSIONS .....	63
<b>ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS.....</b>	<b>65</b>
SIGNING .....	65
SIGNING AT WORK .....	68
THE PEOPLE AT THE CENTRE OR IN THE ORGANISATION .....	68
THE STATUS OF SIGN LANGUAGE.....	71
WHERE SIGNING IS USED .....	76
KNOWLEDGE OF SIGN LANGUAGE .....	78
<b>INDIVIDUALS .....</b>	<b>80</b>
PEOPLE WITH VARYING DEGREES OF INVOLVEMENT WITH DEAF PEOPLE .....	80
FURTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GROUP .....	80
SIGNING .....	81
SIGN LANGUAGE AT WORK .....	83
SIGN LANGUAGE USE .....	84
SIGN USE .....	85
KNOWLEDGE OF SIGN LANGUAGE .....	89
ANALYSIS OF THOSE WITH LITTLE OR NO CONTACT WITH DEAF PEOPLE .....	90
<i>In conclusion</i> .....	94
<b>MAKING COMPARISONS.....</b>	<b>95</b>
DEAF PEOPLE, INSTITUTIONS AND INDIVIDUALS .....	95
LANGUAGE IN USE .....	96
WHERE IS SIGN LANGUAGE USED?.....	101

WHAT DO PEOPLE KNOW ABOUT SIGN LANGUAGE? .....	102
KNOWLEDGE AND CHANGE.....	102
IN CONCLUSION .....	104
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>106</b>

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The conduct of the research was by collaboration with research partners in every Member State of the EU and Norway and Iceland. They are listed in Appendix 2.

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We believe this work can be of great value to Deaf people and the work of so many over such a short space of time should be acknowledged.

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Jim Kyle

Centre for Deaf Studies  
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## Summary

Although Deaf people are an indigenous minority group in the EU, there has been very little cross European research on their languages and communities. On the one hand, this information would be useful in service planning into the next Millennium but it is also vital in developing our understanding of a unique and dynamic European language. In 1988, the European Parliament recognised the sign languages of the Member States. The question is whether that recognition has created an enabling environment for Deaf people and whether national responses to Deafness have had an impact on the current situation of Deaf people.

The project was designed to collect data on sign language status in Europe today. By status, we mean the position which sign language has achieved in comparison to languages in general. Such status may be described in terms of the extent of use and in terms of Deaf and hearing people's knowledge of sign language. The purpose of this work was to construct a picture of sign language use in Europe in 1997 and to determine its comparative status in different Member States. By so doing, the project would provide a basis for EU planning and progress in each participating country.

There were three components to the study:

Interviews with Deaf people

Questionnaire responses from institutions with an involvement in Deafness

Questionnaire returns from individuals, some of whom have no involvement in Deafness

The work began in October 1996 and data collection and principal analysis was completed by July 1997. This represents an extremely compressed time scale and is consistent with the snapshot of Europe that was required. However, the data reported here may undergo further more detailed analysis at a later stage, in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of attitudes to Deafness and sign language. Nevertheless, there is a great deal which can be deduced and reported from this analysis and which casts a great deal of light on what is happening in Europe today.

The survey was planned in Bristol with a fixed frame for sampling the population, linked to age, gender, hearing status, location and nationality. Larger countries had more representatives. Research partners in each country of the European Union, Norway and Iceland, were contracted to carry out the research. Questionnaires and interview materials were translated into the language of the country. Deaf researchers, using the national sign language carried out interviews with Deaf people. Video materials to support this were given to all Deaf researchers at a workshop in February 1997. Researchers used translations originated in Bristol, made agreed adaptations or carried out their own agreed translations. The emphasis was on simplicity of style and all

questions had to be directly comparable across languages. Data collected in each country was returned to Bristol for computer encoding and analysis.

A total of 1030 returns have been analysed: from the Deaf community (325), from organisations and institutions with an involvement in Deafness (251) and from hearing individuals who had varying levels of involvement with Deaf people (454).

There were major variations between countries in terms of experience and provision. These tend to follow a North-South pattern with Nordic countries having more services and correspondingly greater awareness of Deafness. This can be seen throughout the responses of Deaf people, the organisations' respondents and the individual questionnaire returns. It would appear that there is a clear relation between the knowledge and awareness of the population, Deaf and hearing, and the level of provision and services available.

### Deaf People

There are variations in the names given to the communication of Deaf people. On the one hand, Deaf people use "SIGNING" as a way to illustrate their communication with each other, but increasingly they term their signing "SIGN LANGUAGE." However, the names used in each country vary, as awareness of the language has progressed at different rates.

The Deaf people who took part had mostly attended a Deaf school that was usually a day school. Children in Greece, Sweden and Norway tended to begin Deaf school later.

Very few Deaf people (less than 25%) had experienced sign language in use in their schooling *most of the time*. In Portugal and Germany, more than two thirds had teachers, who never signed to them. In contrast, they were likely to sign to children outside of the classroom. Most had learned signing while still at school, although larger numbers (over 40%) of those in Greece and Portugal learned sign after the age of 11 years.

Deaf people use sign much less than hearing people use speech. The Deaf community is not a geographical community or village and so Deaf people's interaction takes place in the evening and at Deaf clubs. There were major differences between countries in the amount of sign use which Deaf people experience. Swedish representatives claimed to have most.

Deaf people used varying extents of sign language with different people. Interestingly, they tended not to sign with their parents or their children (who are mostly hearing) but signed extensively with their partners (mostly Deaf) and with friends.

### Organisations

Although the choice of institutions was to be the same in each country, there were certain institutions which did not exist in some countries – a location for mental health,

an elderly person's home and so on. When asked directly about the status of sign language in their countries, there was a range of responses. In countries that had more developed services, often the responses were more critical than where there was no legislation. Of all 251 returns, 47% felt that recognition of sign language was at a lower level than all other spoken languages or indeed, that there was no recognition at all.

Although all the participants were in centres that involved Deaf people, only 24% had policies on sign language communication at work. Interpreters were used in many countries but much less so in Ireland, Austria, Iceland and Spain. It was possible to generate a composite score for "commitment" to sign at work and in this, the Swedish response showed greatest acceptance, with least positive responses from France, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain, Italy and Austria.

## Hearing Individuals

The returns from individuals included both people who worked with Deaf people and those who had little contact with Deaf people. Mostly they did not believe sign language was recognised in their country. The pattern of knowledge and perception of signing was less developed in this group but only very few had *never* seen sign language.

When the groups were divided according to their extent of contact with deaf people, there were differences according to socio-economic status. It was more likely that professionals responded to the survey request (a common feature of surveys) but one which confounded the variable of contact with deaf people - ie more contact with deaf people was found among professionals (who were in caring or service roles). In order to deal with this, a sub-sample was chosen consisting only of professionals or managers. When this was used for the analysis, the north-south differences and the effects of contact with deaf people became more obvious. Northern countries with more provision and more contact, were more aware and more knowledgeable about Deaf people.

In comparison to work carried out in the early 1980s in the UK, only professionals showed an increased awareness of Deaf people and presented more positive attitudes. People with little contact with Deaf people tended to have more negative attitudes to Deaf people, and showed little advance on figures available for 1981.

## Comparisons

Deaf people tend to believe there is less signing in a range of settings than do hearing people or those in organisations. However, the variable is complex as Deaf people tend to be more critical when there is a higher level of general awareness and provision than where there is less. Countries where the level of provision is less tend to be more optimistic about the extent of use of signing.

When we asked about the existence of laws in favour of sign language, often hearing people believed there were laws when Deaf people did not know about them. Although most television programmes for Deaf people in sign were known to hearing people, in some countries there were Deaf programmes which hearing people did not know about

(Netherlands, Portugal) and some countries where the hearing people were convinced that there was a programme which the Deaf people did not report (France).

On a very simple point, hearing people were likely to be more aware of the existence of a sign language dictionary than Deaf people. It is interesting to consider whether other minority language users would be more aware of their dictionary than would be the majority language users. It seems likely that minority language users would frequently use a dictionary of the majority language. However, in the case of the Deaf community, hearing people were more likely to be owners and users of a dictionary of the national sign language.

This is part of an emerging realisation in our research which seems to cut across many of the responses, that hearing people have more access to information about Deaf people than Deaf people have themselves. This applies even to sign language. When we set a “test” of sign language knowledge, the Deaf people tended to be less knowledgeable than the hearing people in the other groups. There could be many reasons for this including the questions themselves, but the reality remains that Deaf people may have limited access to knowledge which is directly concerned with their own language. Where the access to knowledge is possible, Deaf people are likely to perform better than do hearing people.

A second emerging feature is that the responses from the hearing people and organisations, referred to and created a picture of a service orientation where sign language is *delivered* to Deaf people who *need* it. In contrast, the responses for Deaf people seemed to imply that they wished the language to be accepted and used in all walks of life. The two views are strikingly different. We are beginning to form the opinion that the best explanation of the hearing and organisation responses is that they reflect a ***service-oriented view***, where hearing people see sign language as a ***need*** of Deaf people – something which might be assessed (and costed) and as a device by which Deaf people can be supported. The requirement for involvement by hearing people personally, diminishes and most probably, the *provision* which would be made, is interpreting. Deaf people, in contrast, wish there to be a community language and expect hearing people to engage with this, learn it and use it.

This is brought home in the scenarios where sign language was said to be used and how these situations compared to users of other minority languages. Both Deaf and hearing identified sign language use in service situations – in job counselling, job interviews, but not in personal, health and community situations such as in shops or in visits to the doctor or with the clergy. It looks as if there remains a great deal to be done if sign language is to be a community language.

Taken as a whole, the results are complex and extensive. They will take some time to analyse fully. This is an initial attempt to do so and will provide a base for planning and further discussion.

## Understanding Deafness and Sign Language

### Background

In 1988, the European Parliament passed a motion recognising the sign languages of Europe and requiring Member States to address the issues that follow from this recognition. No specific laws were passed and to date no outcomes have been measured<sup>1</sup>. The European Union of the Deaf obtained a grant from the European Parliament to carry out work to examine the situation in 1997 and to promote sign language in all Member States. This work began in June 1996 and National Committees (NCs) were set up in each country as a result. The Centre for Deaf Studies (CDS) in Bristol was asked to carry out research in parallel with the work of the National Committees and to co-operate with NCs in the development of a framework for progress in sign language throughout Europe.

We have a great deal to learn about Deaf people's views of their own language as well as the arrangements which society makes for the use of sign language. This project is designed to investigate these topics.

### The Primary Issues

In 1980-1, Tervoort received, from 20 countries in Europe, responses to a questionnaire about their views on sign language and its status. His survey results were published in 1983. He concluded that everywhere sign language awareness was on the increase, and noted that,

" .... there are great extremes in European attitudes towards Sign, there is a tendency away from pure oralism, there is pressure on schools from outside, specifically from Deaf adults and parents of Deaf children ...." page 144.

He linked the progress to research but he suggested a continuum of development in education that might be the basis of society's attitude to Deafness:

"There appears to be a tendency to go from oral-only to speech with speech-supportive means ..... from these there is a movement in the direction of the use of Sign to better disambiguate the spoken word; next comes a signed version of the spoken language either with speech or without it ... and finally, the

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<sup>1</sup> The work of the National Committees associated with this project are currently reporting on their respective statutory positions and this will be incorporated in the final EUD report.

continuum develops from Signed Danish, Swedish, English to Danish Sign Language, Swedish Sign Language, British Sign Language etc.” page 146

Such changes at the beginning of the 1980s were thought to be revolutionary and sign language had been recognised in only a few countries eg Sweden and Finland. Nevertheless, there was considerable optimism for the future improvement in the status of sign language.

In June 1988, the European Parliament confirmed the validity of this view and "*recognised sign languages as used by Deaf people in each member state.*" Deaf people assumed that a major breakthrough had occurred. However, in many countries the visible and tangible effects of this *breakthrough* are hard to detect in 1997. The abolition of *the remaining obstacles to the use of sign language* seems as distant as ever. Just how distant is a major question for this study.

## Two Languages

While the majority of people in Europe naturally and effortlessly acquire a spoken language for all social activity, in the past, Deaf people have had to struggle to achieve a single natural language. Although there were times when sign language use was seen as an indication of Deaf people's monolingualism and symptomatic of isolation, our understanding is now rather different. However, rather than return to the last century when manualism was presented as the norm for Deaf education, researchers have proposed the best of both worlds - bilingualism or a bilingual approach. It is known from extensive linguistic research that two languages are better than one - not only in terms of the child's language sensitivity, but also in terms of the cognitive growth of the child (Baker, 1993). As a result, schools throughout Europe have begun to consider bilingualism and have begun to implement an education system that attempts to create bilingual competence in the child. It is proposed that, if Deaf children have sign language competence in early education, they have a channel for the development of spoken and written language. The potential of Deaf children can be released in this positive enabling framework.

An excellent analysis and commentary on this situation comes from the Americans, Johnson, Liddell and Erting (1989). In their monograph, which succeeded in bringing to the fore, a vital debate on the direction of American Deaf Education, they set out important principles for the language experiences of Deaf children, under which sign competence was considered a priority with speech and writing being secondary. In their view, Deaf children, like all other children, should have a fluent and effective language from the earliest age. Bilingualism will follow naturally before, and then, during schooling. From this perspective, sign language plays a vital role in the establishment of communication and cognition.

A similar debate has occurred in Europe. For example, in the UK and in Holland, new bilingual initiatives in school are being implemented. These are joining established programmes in Sweden and Denmark, all now emphasising the principles of early access

to sign. It might seem that the status of sign language in European Deaf education has never been higher. Moreover, it might be imagined that Tervoort's views have been borne out to the extent that there is a movement from oralism to supported means, such as fingerspelling or cued speech, to sign supported speech and finally to sign language which can be delivered in a bilingual framework. However, he also predicted ominously that:

"Use of a true sign language in educational contexts is simply impossible as long as such a language remains unidentified and its grammar and lexicon unaccounted for." page 146, 1983

Moreover, it seems reasonable to suggest that the understanding of sign language is further dependent on a recognition of the community and culture of Deaf people. Evidence to date would suggest that this latter target has not yet been achieved.

### **A View of Deafness**

Although theorists, researchers and Deaf people are more aware of the possibilities of sign languages and have actively promoted bilingual policies and practices, the reality is that hearing society has hardly accepted their validity. The population of Europe is nearly 400 million people, yet less than 0.1% have real access to sign language. Figures presented by supporters of sign language are very optimistic in terms of the number of Deaf sign users and of the numbers of fluent signers among the hearing population. Although there is a gradual retrenchment in oralism and a huge deficit in oralist research as compared to sign research, the impact on the communities of Europe is limited.

At the same time, it is suspected that the impact on Deaf people is also limited. There is an emerging small group of Deaf people who live and work in signing environments. Yet the vast majority of Deaf people live in hearing communities, born to hearing parents, having hearing children, uncertain as to how and when they should use sign language. Although teachers and parents are interested in sign language, rarely have they learned it effectively anywhere in Europe, and they have no means to immerse themselves in the language or culture. Despite their initial enthusiasm, they reach an early and low plateau of performance in signing. Significantly, the decision makers in education, psychology, social services are still unable to sign. In Europe, there can be no more than a handful of headteachers of Deaf schools who are Deaf themselves; there are still relatively few hearing headteachers who can communicate effectively in sign with the Deaf children in their care. This situation cannot be highlighted enough as it is such an anomalous circumstance in terms of language and education. No hearing community would tolerate their children being educated solely by those who cannot communicate with, nor even understand, their children. Yet Deaf children with normal cognitive ability are expected to function in just this environment.

Oralism may be on the wane but sign language has yet to fill the vacuum.

There have been changes in many places (as Tervoort suggested there would be) notably in the previously strong oralist countries of Britain and Holland. These policy changes in Deaf schools have brought sign into the classroom. But the problems of hearing staff learning a sign language later in life and in less than ideal learning environments, has meant that the use of sign in class is mostly accompanied by speech and it suffers from all of the weaknesses which were reported by Johnson, Liddell and Erting (1989). For example, Deaf children are not able to understand their teachers well when speech and sign are mixed - even when delivered apparently fluently. The rights of access to the curriculum can rarely be achieved when this form and level of communication is in place.

Although more people talk about bilingualism than before, the practice of parents, teachers and other professionals is still some way from the use of two languages. At times, this circumstance may arise as a deliberate policy. Sign may appear in school but this is rarely an abandonment of spoken language, merely an attempt at soft assimilation (Skuttnabb-Kangas, 1981). Sign may be treated as a temporary prop to be replaced by the language of the majority as soon as it is feasible.

It is clear that there has been only a limited move to *heritage* teaching<sup>2</sup> (as there has been in the case of say, American Indians). Deaf children remain ignorant of their Deaf roots and of the culture, to which they could belong. More significantly, they still come to their natural language late and ineffectively, at best with low status models, at worst, with only peers, struggling at the same time to develop a self-image and native language. Not surprisingly, the performance in school is depressed.

Recent studies in Flanders and in Ireland confirm the pattern of low achievement in education and employment and the resulting low personal status attached to the Deaf person.

### Areas of growth and change

Interestingly, the media are much more interested in Deaf people than ever before and, as a consequence, opportunities in Higher Education have increased; more interpreters are being trained than in the past. At the same time, the north-south divide in Europe is further confirmed by these developments (interpreter training, television provision and college access). Although Scandinavian initiatives in education and social provision have grown, Mediterranean Europe tends to lag behind in each of the areas that would bring recognition of the special needs of Deaf people. It would seem that there remain gross imbalances throughout Europe.

Nevertheless, on a positive note, wherever the research has been carried out, we can show that Deaf people have the same level of intelligence as hearing people. There is

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<sup>2</sup> This is an approach to the teaching of language and culture which makes the value of the community quite explicit. Heritage teaching would emphasise the role of famous Deaf people and show a positive view of Deaf Studies to all children.

considerable evidence that Deaf people perform in cognitive non-verbal tasks just as well as hearing people. In certain visual tasks they perform better. The intellectual potential of Deaf people is the same as that of hearing people. While educationalists have known this for some time, it has never been exploited fully and it tends to be forgotten when the poor levels of employment and academic progress are described.

### *Deaf Roles in Research*

Also, sign language has been recognised and researched by linguists and psychologists. In many European countries, there are teams of researchers studying and documenting aspects of sign language and its grammar. Usually, these teams *include* Deaf people; significantly there are no teams *led by Deaf people* - at least none in Universities or in Public Laboratories or Institutions. In some places, the Deaf staff are not fully recognised staff. Hearing people may be unwilling to challenge the establishment and find themselves appointing Deaf people as staff with any title but academic research staff. Institutional regulations which set the levels of qualification which have to be reached before appointing a person to a certain post, often discriminate against Deaf people who are frequently unable to compete in this way. Deaf people rarely achieve the status that would widen the horizons of others. Even when the job involves study of their own language, Deaf people occupy lower status jobs.

### *Integration*

This is often recognised in certain ways and a caring society will try to integrate its *disabled* or less fortunate groups. When society tries to *include* Deaf people, sometimes the results are *exclusion*. Although civil rights are invoked as a stimulus to inclusive education and as a means of informing society of its disabled members, the reality for many Deaf children is that *integration* highlights isolation by making the contrast between themselves and hearing children more obvious. When education is competitive, Deaf children appear to do less well than their hearing peers.

### *Interventions*

Often the cause of the problem is located in the condition of Deafness itself. Deaf people may suffer from continued medical intervention. The search for an elusive cure for Deafness continues. As long as Medicine treats Deafness as an illness, there will exist the right of intervention for medical practitioners. Parents will be convinced of the need to *cure* the illness. New operations on their own children will be accepted and embraced by parents. However, there is often no clear guidance from Deaf people themselves, when they are parents. It is too easy to be swayed by the higher status professionals and to act against one's own instincts. Deaf people often believe their children should avoid the problems which they faced as children and so they are prepared to believe the arguments that all is different now and that their Deaf children will not be discriminated against in the same way that they were in the past. As a result each generation seems to repeat the mistakes of the last. The Deaf community is often not able to defend its own language and culture, even though it has been in existence for a very long time.

Researchers have recently re-discovered sign language (there were excellent descriptions available in the 19th century e.g. Tyler, 1864) but it is often the case that Deaf people are not aware of their own language's rules. Few Deaf people can explain an aspect or a feature of the grammar of their own language. They have had little access to the research findings of the teams mentioned earlier.

### *Video Information*

Access to information is commonly seen as a priority but it is problematic for Deaf people. The reason is simple: there is as yet no good means of disseminating information in a sign language form other than in live presentation. In order to obtain information Deaf people have to attend lectures. Videotapes with instructional material are not effective or convenient as they are wholly linear in overall structure - the viewer has to play the tape from the beginning to the end and in the correct sequence. This makes it more time-consuming to extract information from fixed sources. It is also the case that the information is presented in a person-specific form – that is, the signing has to be done by a person whose face is visible and so none of the information is presented in a neutral way as is the case for written or voiced-over material on television. Compared to hearing people's access to books, Deaf people are much worse off in their use of video.

For hearing people, the explosion in knowledge which came from the invention of printing was in having available a non-linear means of information gathering. A book can be opened on any page and the reader can move around almost at will. Books are also readable anywhere. On the other hand, signed videos are often translations of spoken text or are insertions of interpreted text in programmes made for hearing people. It would seem that other than in Denmark, where there has been a stronger tradition of use of this medium, the videotapes that are currently in circulation are having a rather limited impact.

Such a lack of dissemination has a further knock-on effect. The discoveries of researchers are not presented to Deaf people in a meaningful form; Deaf parents are not convinced of the status of their own language. They are likely to be influenced by the society in which they live and they may feel they have to accept the view of the majority. They end up trying to implement a speech policy at home - in order to prepare their hearing children for the hearing majority world. Significantly, we have also come across Deaf parents speaking to Deaf children, rather than signing. This language insecurity leads to distorted communication at home and limited development of the natural language.

### *Mental Health Difficulties*

More significantly, as a result of educational guidance principles for child-rearing promoted by oralist philosophies, in the past and even now, Deaf people may experience mental health problems for many years after they leave school. Although the well-meaning education offered by hearing educators may not produce delinquent Deaf children during school days, the incidence of mental ill-health later in life, in Deaf people,

is much greater than in the hearing population - anything up to 15 times (Griggs and Kyle, 1996). The lack of communication in education and at home is a major obstacle to later adjustment in a hearing society.

## The Future

The opportunities for Deaf people ought to be greater now than ever before. Advanced telecommunications are opening up the possibility of visual communication at a distance. Video-based media offers the chance for Deaf people to learn through the medium of their own language. Society is on the verge of a major revolution.

In the light of these complex issues, the proposed study will offer a base of information and data that will be of value to EUD and to policy makers. There are many factors that have to be taken into consideration in the conduct of the work, not least of which is the concept of language status. To understand this status it might be helpful to consider what we know about Deaf communities.

## Deaf Community and Culture

### What we know already

There have been many studies of the Deaf community<sup>3</sup> over the last century. Binet (1910) carried out one of the more systematic studies on Deaf people in Paris in which he highlighted the extent of failure of education and showed the significance of sign language to the community. These two points have been universally reported.

In this study, the focus was to be on language status but it is appropriate to describe some of the features about the Deaf community which form the backdrop to the study. This review is not meant to be exhaustive nor comprehensive, as it draws mainly on English language sources. At the same time, it should be said that we have yet to find any significant differences in the main variables in Deaf communities in different countries. What we do find are different stages of evolution.

### The Deaf Community

Baker and Padden (1978) provide one of the more useful definitions:

"The Deaf community comprises those Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals who share a common language, common experiences and values and a common way of interacting with each other and with hearing people. The most basic factor determining who is a member of the Deaf community seems to be what is called 'attitudinal Deafness'. This occurs when a person identifies him/herself as a member of the Deaf community and other members accept that person as part of the community." Baker and Padden (1978, p. 4)

Some people are 'born into' the Deaf community in an obvious way as the children of Deaf parents. These are the minority, since only 5% of the Deaf community will have both parents Deaf. Another 5% may have one parent Deaf. Up to 20% will have a Deaf brother or sister (Kyle and Allsop, 1982). Other Deaf members are drawn from families where there is no Deafness and where it is likely that the child will be isolated. For most children from Deaf families, sign language will be acquired and used in all situations where effective interaction is required. For those with no contact with other Deaf people in the early years, the communication problems can be immense.

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<sup>3</sup> It should be pointed out that the term Deaf, with a capitalised first letter, is taken to mean those people who are culturally Deaf - that is, they choose to associate with other Deaf people, use sign language and see themselves as a minority group. People with a hearing loss are described separately, if they do not have a cultural affiliation with Deaf people. Not all those with a hearing loss are Deaf.

## Deaf People at Work

The most common observation on employment is that people are "underemployed rather than unemployed." Deaf people are likely to obtain poorer jobs than other groups.

In 1980-82 the majority of Deaf people in the Deaf community worked in a factory - nearly 50% of all those in work. Deaf people tend to be squeezed into the worst jobs. There is an age difference - younger Deaf people are more likely to be in offices. Deaf people generally have jobs in the unskilled and semi-skilled occupations (Kyle and Pullen, 1985 - 62%). Very few are found in Social Class I (Professional/Managerial) - generally less than 3%, as compared to more than 20% of hearing people. Kyle and Allsop (1982) found that very few Deaf people ever reached a position of supervision over others and the prospects for promotion were very bleak for most.

### *Satisfaction at Work*

Kyle and Woll (1985) report that Deaf people were generally happy at work, even given the fact that very few had another Deaf person in the same factory or division. Nevertheless, the statistics tend to hide the great gulf in the quality of working life between Deaf and hearing people. Foster (1986), in an examination of graduates of the National Technical Institute for the Deaf in the USA found many areas of problems when she interviewed Deaf workers. Although all felt competent in the carrying out of their job, communication difficulties were often a major barrier. Most of the workers were lonely at work, spending most of their free time on their own. Their career goals tended to be lowered after initial contact with the workplace - supervisory roles were usually ruled out. Over half described situations in which they felt they had been treated unfairly.

Very few Deaf people are supervisors. The majority work under the direction of other people. They are likely to *try* to communicate and they use a mixture of signs, gestures, speech and lip-reading. However, they are seldom likely to be involved in discussions at work. The most significant finding was that when we asked if they were likely to gain promotion in the next two years, 63% said it was impossible – a marked contrast with hearing groups. Nevertheless, there were also positive attitudes expressed about involvement at work.

### *Jobs Deaf People can do*

When we compared the jobs that Deaf people thought they could do and the jobs that they thought hearing people could do, we find some significant differences. Communication, lack of education and lack of qualifications are at the heart of the lack of confidence of Deaf people.

### *Bias in the Workplace*

Schein (1982) confirms most of the employment results for Deaf people in the USA. Stinson (1970) suggests underemployment arises because of poor self-image, though given the problems of stress and pressure from hearing society, the low self-esteem is likely to be a product rather than a cause. Christiansen (1982) attributes the underemployment of Deaf people to the change in the economy from a base in manufacturing to a base in service industry. Deaf people are simply not represented well in services. He concludes:

"In general, it appears that in order to secure a given job in the labour force, a Deaf person must be better educated, and more qualified, than a hearing person vying for the same position." Christiansen (1982, p. 19)

Jones and Pullen (1987) in a major study of Deaf people in Europe, broadly confirm these findings in the perception of Deaf people. They found evidence of underemployment, thwarted ambition and even occupational segregation, attributed to the type of expectancies built up by schooling. Interestingly, they found that jobs were usually acquired through personal contacts rather than on the open market or through the rehabilitation or job-finding agencies. This might be a factor in Deaf people becoming "stuck" in one level of employment, as it is difficult to see how their employment needs could have been adequately evaluated in that situation.

### Education

All the major studies of *national* groups in different countries show high levels of failure. Deaf children read poorly (profoundly Deaf 16 year-olds have an average reading age less than nine years), speak unintelligibly, have limited lip-reading skills (Conrad, 1979). They are less likely to go to college in the USA (Christiansen, 1982) though more likely to go into Further Education in the UK (Kyle and Pullen, 1985).

Wolk and Schildroth (1986), in a study of 2414 children and young people in the USA found 55% were reported by their teachers to have unintelligible speech. Allen (1986) analysing the national Stanford achievement tests on nearly 6000 schoolchildren aged between 8 and 18 years, found major delays in reading performance (i.e. a levelling out at around third grade level - approximately 9 years old) and mathematics scores below 7th grade level(13 year level).

At eight years old Deaf children were approximately 18 months behind the hearing norms and the gap widened at each succeeding age group. In Mathematics, the gap was less and showed growth up to 15 years of age when a plateau was reached around 3 years behind hearing peers. With a detailed examination of the samples used, Allen is able to conclude that the improvement since 1974 is a real one and that, despite the

levelling off, there are grounds for believing that Deaf children can continue to improve on the figures arising from the tests. Unfortunately, this does not necessarily mean longitudinal improvement, since when Kyle and Pullen (1985) tested Deaf young people in Britain 7 years after they had left school, they found no improvement in reading performance even when the Deaf person felt they read a lot at work.

When we consider such things as speech and lip-reading, we find that the performance is just the same - Deaf children do very badly considering that they are just as intelligent as hearing students.

The purpose here is to consider the impact that such a situation has on the Deaf Community itself. The effect is colossal. On the one hand, the schooling often produces great feelings of failure, either during school-days or when entering the workplace, and on the other, the schooling itself is disabling when it institutionalises Deafness (in large residential settings) and when it represses the formation of a successful identity.

One "obvious" solution to this problem is to avoid the separateness of the Deaf school by mainstreaming the Deaf child from the earliest age, and thus avoiding the perils mentioned above. Unfortunately, unlike some "disabled" groups, this may not be a solution for Deaf people.

While schooling may be a difficult experience, it is also crucially important. Through the continuing contact with other Deaf people (even where there are no adult role models) language and culture grow. The key adolescent stage of establishing identity is met in a community environment where success in communication and social interaction can be experienced. For many Deaf young people this could be the most important period of their lives when the socialisation takes place, not from adult models, but from other Deaf young people. It is not surprising therefore, that one of the first questions that Deaf people ask each other on meeting is *which school* the other attended.

## Sign Language

Sign Language is the language of Deaf people; a language of space and movement using the hands, body, face and head. Deaf children in Deaf families use it as the first language. Knowledge of sign language use dates back at least two thousand years in the Western world, and probably even earlier in Chinese writings. The earliest English source (1644) is John Bulwer's "*Chirologia: or the Naturall language of the Hand. Composed of the Speaking Motions, and discoursing Gestures thereof. Whereunto is added Chironomia: or the art of Manuall Rhetoricke etc.*"

One of the most striking differences between signs and words is the frequency with which signs bear some visual relationship to their referents. It is perhaps not surprising that visual languages exhibit more iconicity than auditory languages, in that objects in the external world tend to have more visual associations than auditory links. However, because of the importance attached to the concept of arbitrariness in spoken language,

the frequent iconicity in sign language messages has been considered as making sign languages uniquely different from spoken languages.

There is now a great deal of published research on sign language - too much to describe it in detail here. The language exhibits all the richness of spoken languages, but realised in a different modality and with different articulators. It has grammatical and inflectional rules and many of these have been described in published work. One aspect that we can mention as an example, is the category of classifiers.

Research on several sign languages (Kyle and Woll 1985, McDonald 1983, Brennan 1992) has suggested that they exhibit a predicate classifier system, although there is disagreement on the appropriateness of the term 'classifier'. One group relates to the handling of properties of objects. These produce such signs based on representative handshapes - 'hold a compact or small cylindrical object' (such as DAGGER, LAWNMOWER), 'handle a thin, flattish object' (such as PAPER, CLOTH), 'handle a round object' (such as BALL, LID), 'handle a small object' (such as COIN, FLOWER), 'handle a small, narrow object' (such as PLUG, SWITCH). There are a very large number of these grammatical categories that are rule governed.

Such linguistic descriptions are expanding as the capacity to record and analyse sign language has developed. The language is extremely varied and rich. In European terms we can verify that there are different sign languages in each country and that each has begun to be studied. Longest established research is in Sweden and Denmark but teams of researchers exist in Germany, Netherlands, UK and Italy. This project is not about the structure of the language itself but rather more about Deaf and hearing people's views on the language.

## Deaf Cultural Life

Deaf culture has begun to emerge through the media interest in sign languages and the awareness of what Deaf people might contribute to the 'visual arts'. "High culture," as this form of public performance may be termed, is increasingly apparent in Deaf poetry festivals and drama productions.

As might be expected, these are evolving at different rates and in different ways in each country. These will draw on the traditions of the country as a whole as well as the specific features of the Deaf way of life. These might be seen in the customs that are in place.

There are many different situations where we can see the customs of Deaf people - in restaurants, in meeting people, in parties and so on. There are also many Deaf games that rely on visual humour.

### *Cultural Identity*

While the customs and behaviour are outward manifestations of culture, there is an important "inner" factor that is the extent to which the individual feels part of and comfortable with these practices and experiences. Cultural identity could be measured in some sense by one's adherence to the beliefs and customs of the community. It is indicated by involvement at the Deaf club and the degree to which one seeks out other Deaf people. But it is more than this - it is a sense of closeness to others, a removal of barriers and of the necessity to negotiate the norms of interaction. It is a feeling of shared experience of the world. It is the identity of being Deaf.

### *Deafness-Hearingness*

One further critical dimension of Deaf community life is its closeness or distance from the hearing norms. Deaf culture has grown in adversity with, at times, appalling experiences being imposed on very young Deaf children by unknowing parents and by well-intentioned teachers and other professionals. Not surprisingly Deaf people view their distance from hearing behaviour and custom as a key indicator of their Deafness.

Deaf people have to accept the hearing way, in one respect, because it is only through their understanding of it that they can progress in employment but there tends to be a mistrust of hearing ways.

### **How Many Deaf People?**

Unfortunately there is not a simple single answer.

Although there are few direct studies of incidence coupled to social studies, which would determine the size of the Deaf population, good estimates can be made on the basis of published work. At its simplest level, we can predict that between one in 2,000 people will have a severe-to-profound hearing loss. A crude projection would give the UK a Deaf population of 25,000 people. The age characteristics of this population should broadly match those of the hearing population - i.e. it is a population whose average age is becoming older.

### *Searching for Statistics in Europe*

As a first step, official statistics of the EU were consulted. These tend to produce estimates that are much higher than what we commonly believe to be true: the statistics published by the EC suggest that 33% of the adult working population have an impairment and 19% have a disability. Eleven per cent are expected to have a disability related to language, speech, vision or hearing. This reduces finally to a prediction of hearing problems for 2.65 million people in the UK. This will include those who acquire a hearing loss. Throughout these sets of official statistics the numbers seem to be inflated

and unreliable. (Source: Eurostat, p137). The reality is that to date we have not found adequate statistics that would allow us to make comparisons across the EU.

The truth is that that we have only broad ranges for the numbers of Deaf community members in each country.

## The Status of Sign Language

The purpose of the study was to prepare a description of how sign language is viewed in Europe in 1997. Although there have been considerable strides in provision for groups such as Deaf people and, although there is a continuing interest in the EU about minority languages, sign language remains a little known language. Minority languages' programmes do not involve sign language and researchers in that field tend to be resistant to introducing sign language into an environment where the struggle for national status and recognition is already quite severe. Deaf users of sign language are not well integrated into the language milieu in Europe. We know of only one sign language interpreter who has been accepted as a member of the international interpreter's association and this was because she worked in two spoken languages as well as sign languages.

These attitudes towards sign language are the main focus in this study.

### Research <sup>4</sup>

Sociolinguistic research is still very much in its infancy in the context of European sign languages but it is a growing area of academic interest. Research is needed in order to become aware of the way sign languages vary according to the users, what they are doing, and the attitudes they have to their language.

There is no doubt that sign languages should have the full status of "languages". They fulfil all requirements for a human language (such as using small numbers of basic units to produce potentially infinite numbers of varied utterances, or being able to talk about events distant in place or time). One attribute of languages has always been considered to be the essentially arbitrary nature of the symbols used for the referents. Sign language symbols often are not arbitrary, being frequently visually motivated, and this was used as evidence that they were not "proper" languages. However, linguists now accept that arbitrariness is not a required characteristic for a human language.

Given that sign languages are accepted as languages, it is necessary to consider their relationship with society.

There are 4 possible relationships between language and society:

- people and society influence language;
- language influences society and people;
- there is interaction as language influences people and society *and* people and society influence language;

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<sup>4</sup> This section was written by Rachel Sutton-Spence, 1997

- there is no influence of either and so language is just a tool used by people and there is no social effect.

### *People influence language and language use*

We can see this if we look at the way people in different social groups use language differently. Younger people sign differently from older people; people from different regions might use different types of language.

The number of Deaf people in a society affects the language. In countries where a significant proportion of Deaf people come from families with another Deaf family member, the language will be maintained and transmitted down the generations. In countries where there is no focal Deaf community, the strength of the sign language is very different. For example, in Nicaragua it would appear that there is almost no genetic Deafness, which means that no Deaf children learn sign language from their parents. In other societies (in Yucatan in Mexico, or Bali in Indonesia) where there are many Deaf people, the language is much stronger. In one area of Mexico City, there is a very high incidence of Deafness and, despite their lack of education and poverty (they are even too poor to go to a Deaf club), they have their own dialect of Mexican Sign Language, because they all live near to one other. We can see that the number of Deaf people and their social situation affects the language that they use.

Power over a language is an important aspect of the influence of people and society upon a language; those who have power can manipulate the language to suit their own aims. This has been true throughout history and for many languages, but is also true for sign languages. The Abbé de l'Épée, founder of the first school for Deaf people in France, had considerable power over the form and status of French Sign Language. Before he started using the signs of Deaf people, it had very little status, but after his acceptance of signing, the "Establishment" of both church and state took the issues of signing more seriously. However, De l'Épée also believed that the "natural signing" of Deaf people should be altered to follow the grammar of French, and this attitude also affected the status of the natural sign languages of Deaf communities.

Many other people in more recent times have had *power* over sign languages, including linguists, sign language teaching bodies, or sign language lexicographers. In the past in Britain, the missionaries had a great deal of social importance and their form of signing was respected. In the early 1980s, the production team of the BBC's See Hear! had power to decide that signing had to be accompanied by speech, even though many Deaf people disagreed. Nevertheless, ordinary members of Deaf communities have always had some power over their language because they have been the ones who use it every day.

*Language influences people*

There have been claims that sign languages do not have abstract signs because all signs are visually motivated and so Deaf people "can't think about abstract things" (like love, bravery, inflation, investment for the future etc). If this were true, then we could say this was an example of language affecting people. However, we know sign languages can express anything that spoken languages can.

It is possible that signers look at the world differently from speakers, because sign languages are visual and spatial. Thinking in a language that concentrates on order and space, makes a person more likely to look at the world in that way. One of the major blocks for hearing people in learning signed languages (rather than signed versions of spoken languages) is learning to think about the world in a visual and spatial way. Note, however, that hearing people are capable of seeing the world spatially - it's just that they are not used to including space in their language.

*Society and language influence each other*

Speech and social behaviour are constantly interacting. All the time language is changing because of social contexts and social contexts cause the language to be changed.

*Neither interact with each other or influence each other*

Some linguists would like to see language as something pure, abstract and untouched by the real world, like a mathematical formula. From a sociolinguistic view, this idea is untenable.

The relationship between language and power, and the importance of attitudes to different languages is central to much sociolinguistic research. The language that people use may influence other people's attitudes towards them.

The history of European sign languages is closely tied up with power. Children caught using signing in school were reprimanded; hearing people tell Deaf people they are stupid because "Deaf English" is influenced by BSL, so that it looks like "bad English"; Deaf people are denied access to many jobs, or roles in society because they do not use English. All these are examples of a language being affected by power.

Sociolinguistic research itself has power. It is a "well-known sociolinguistic fact" that Eskimos have many different words for snow. However, the reality is that the Inuit languages *do not* in fact have all those words for snow - just one of those pieces of information that believers repeat without ever checking. Any Inuit would have told us immediately that this "fact" was nonsense, but no-one ever thought to ask. Similar myths may arise for sign language and Deaf people.

Sociolinguistics will describe variety within a language. People who speak a language have a wide linguistic repertoire unless they have very severe learning difficulties, or are learning the language as a foreign language. This means they can use language in many different ways, depending on the situation they are in. The sort of language that they use also depends on their social background and social identity. These features combine to provide a set of warning signals for research on variety of language:

- Basic linguistic study is still very recent and the general descriptive linguistics remains to be completely developed. First of all, we need a good understanding of how a language works in general, before we can start thinking of how it varies.
- Sociolinguistics of sign language is often politically difficult. Some people do not yet believe that sign languages are worthy of study because they think the languages are limited. Some research has looked at sign languages, but only to see them as a route to the spoken language competence.
- Relatively few linguistic researchers are Deaf native signers, so they cannot fully understand the social factors involved, and do not know enough about varieties of sign languages. Hearing linguists do work on their own languages at first but rarely have any knowledge of Deaf Studies.
- Much sociolinguistic work has been done on English, which is an important world language with a long written history and a very high status. Some linguists have been tempted to try to study sign languages as though they were just like English - thus reducing the values of the studies.

### *Attitudes to languages and varieties of a language*

In the past, many Deaf people had no pride in their language and even denied they used it. Even now, many Deaf and hearing still think it is not a "good" language, or that English is in some way "better".

Many languages around the world experience this, eg minority languages in India. Language choices in this case may rest with economic power.

### *Language planning*

One of the causes of change in sign languages has been language planning - ie when people set out to make formal changes to language use. It is common in spoken languages. Modern Hebrew was formally written and taught to people by a committee; modern Norwegian was written initially by one person; Portuguese was "tidied" up in the 1950s to make it more regular; German has recently had some changes made to it; India made a deliberate decision to introduce Hindi as a national language after independence. Ever since public education of Deaf people has existed, hearing people have attempted to alter the language used by Deaf people.

Even the great sign language enthusiasts of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, such as de l'Épée in France, and Thomas and Edward Gallaudet in America tried to alter the "natural signs" of Deaf children, to match the structure of the spoken language of the country.

### *Standardisation*

One of the causes of language change is standardisation. The standard form of a language is the one used by the educated elite of the language community and so it has high prestige. It cuts across regional differences and is an institutionalised norm that can be used in the mass-media to teach foreigners. It is usually the form of the language that is written, and which has grammars and is found in the dictionary.

It is by no means clear that there is a standard form of sign language. Standard English is the language used by the social elite in the UK, and is not regionally identifiable. Standard English is the dialect that is taught to second language learners of English. Standard English is written, taught in schools and is validated by being preserved in a dictionary (any words from non-standard forms of English that do make it into dictionaries are clearly marked as being non-standard). Standard English is used on television and radio and by government organisations. So far there is no convincing evidence of the existence of a "standard form" of sign language.

Sometimes it is very important to say that two varieties are just two different ways of speaking the same language, rather than two languages, for political reasons. Catalan (used around Barcelona and the Balearic Islands) is now recognised as a language, but 50 years ago was just a dialect of Spanish, because the government wanted the Catalans to think of themselves as Spaniards. Deaf Peruvians who live in the mountains sign differently from Deaf Peruvians who live on the coast (especially in their capital city, Lima), and yet both are "LSP" (Peruvian Sign Language). There are many examples of countries where the sign language used in different areas seem very different, but are called by one name, to give the language a national identity. There are some people in Britain who might have problems understanding the signing of another British Deaf person (or at least are aware that it is very different) but still feel it is BSL, when they are thinking in terms of national identity.

### *Understanding the situation of sign language*

This study draws on the sociolinguistic approaches highlighted above in order to provide a snapshot of the status of sign language in Europe today.

Sign languages can achieve status in many different ways:

- they can be officially recognised in the legislation of the country;
- they can be used in education, officially or unofficially
- they can be recommended by professionals - educators, doctors, social workers

- they can appear on television and be discussed in other mass media
- they can be actively promoted by significant Deaf people
- they can be researched by groups of high status individuals, eg Universities, or there can be governmental support for research and development
- they can be available in the public domain as a dictionary or set of materials
- they can be actively promoted in pre-school services or in the home
- there may be effective teaching of sign language in public institutions or there may be a recognised curriculum
- there may be a resultant sign language interpreting programme
- funding may be provided by the State when interpreters are engaged
- the languages may be used by Deaf people when they meet each other in familiar settings, ie the Deaf club, social gatherings (this would seem to be the minimum for community life but not all groups of the Deaf community may use sign language automatically – some may mix it with speech even with other Deaf people)
- they can be used when they meet unfamiliar people in mixed Deaf/hearing groups
- they may be used in public by high profile Deaf people - preferring to use the signed language with an interpreter, than use Deaf accented speech
- they may be used at home by Deaf parents with hearing children
- they can have a documented history of which Deaf people are aware

All of these are features of language acceptance by society and by Deaf society. The proposed research takes all of these into account in the collection of data (the questionnaires/ interview schedules will reflect these) and will attempt to build a picture of sign language status based on these ideas.

## Method for the Study

This study was set up to examine the position of sign languages in each of the Member States of the EU. The design was based on a need to utilise the skills and experiences of researchers in countries throughout Europe. National Committees were also set up. Their role was to promote sign language according to the priorities that they established. The research work was designed to complement the activities of the National Committees and to provide them with data that they might use in presenting their cases for better services and for greater recognition. In order to do this in the timescale available<sup>5</sup>, a systematic framework was set up. The questions to be asked had to be able to be translated into the languages of each country and had still to be valid as a cross-national study. This meant that the questions and answers had to be comparable across language boundaries. This necessitated closed questions on the whole, with scope for limited "written-in" replies. The study is limited by the nature of the tools that had to be developed and by the factors of the variation in each individual country.

### The Sample Populations

In order to deal with the issue as defined, it was necessary to broaden the scope of the sampling. As well as needing the views of the people who were active in the field it was vital that the general public, or at least those with limited experience of Deafness, were included. There were three groups targeted in this study. The make-up of the groups was altered as a result of preliminary discussion with research partners and the National Committees. It was intended that all countries would contact the same groups of people. The three groups were:

- Deaf people
- institutions with a role in Deafness
- hearing people, most of whom had a connection to Deafness (these were needed to provide an external view of the recognition of sign language)

#### *Deaf People*

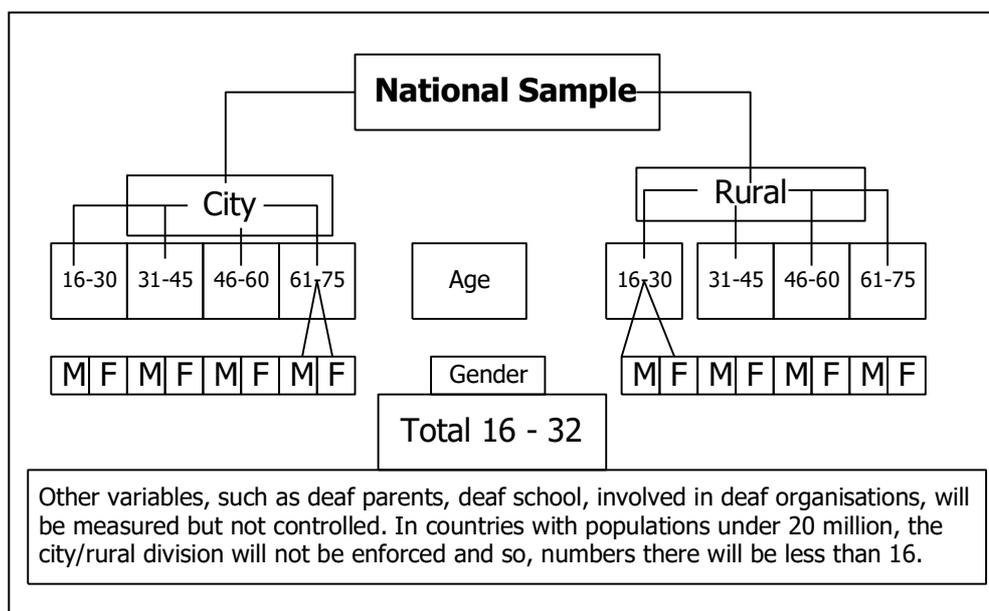
Between 8 and 32 Deaf people were to be interviewed<sup>6</sup> in each country within the following framework.

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<sup>5</sup> The research was carried out in a nine month period from mid-October 1996.

<sup>6</sup> The numbers to be interviewed are small to ensure that the partners have time to collect the data and to make a preliminary national analysis for their own purposes. We are trying to keep the responses very simple and mostly closed questions will be used.

Table 4.1 The Sampling Frame



Some deviation from the overall structure was possible as long as all the age cells had entries and there were the same number of males as females in the whole sample. The total was to vary according to the population of the country. In some cases, there was to be more than one partner in that country, because of the diversity in that country and difficulties in communication.

### *Institutions*

Partners were expected to contact institutions as listed below and either conduct a telephone/text phone interview or provide support to a postal questionnaire.

Where the institution did not exist, a similar organisation or location was to be substituted. However, the survey needed to know wherever the institution did not exist and this was to be noted in the partner's report.

- Up to 4 Deaf schools (2 with 6-12 years, 2 with older children, 13-18 years) {1:2:4}<sup>7</sup>
- 1 Further or Higher Education establishment which has a special work or support programme with Deaf students
- 1 location for mental health care of Deaf people (health institution, hospital or special centre)

<sup>7</sup> Depending on size, partners were to contact either 1, 2 or 4 schools. So Germany would contact 4; Denmark 1.

- 1 location for elderly Deaf people where they can live together (residential home, care home)
- 1 hospital Audiology or Surgery department
- 1 location with sign language teaching (college or adult education or agency)
- up to 4 Deaf clubs or associations {1:2:4} (social organisations for Deaf people) - at least one of these should be in the capital city and another should be in a smaller town.
- 1 hard-of-hearing association or club (people who lose their hearing later or people who have a partial hearing loss). This might be a club for elderly people or be related to the national Deaf organisation
- 1 organisation for parents of Deaf children
- 1 media location - television or video production for Deaf people
- 1 interpreting agency or organisation for interpreters (preferably not a Deaf association)
- 1 government department which deals with Deaf people (likely to be a department of health or a department of labour, but this could also be a Ministry of Culture or Ministry of Education)
- 1 research centre in sign language

Questions were kept simple for ease of processing and for speed of completion at these institutions. However, it was expected that the questions would be extensive enough to obtain considerable detail and the plan was for the questionnaire to take 30-40 minutes to complete.

Once institutions had been targeted and their names and addresses obtained, the research partner was to duplicate and send out the questionnaire. This was accompanied by a letter of explanation based on a model supplied by Bristol. It was the responsibility of the research partner to ensure that this letter was culturally appropriate. Each letter specified a date for the return of the questionnaires which was to be *two weeks from the date of sending*. In some cases, where the mail was unreliable, they could be distributed in another way. After two weeks, the research partner was to call or contact the institution to encourage the completion of the questionnaire or to offer to do so over the phone. Completed questionnaires returned to the research partner were to be accumulated and sent to Bristol during February and March 1997.

### *Hearing individuals*

The following *hearing* people were to be contacted:

- ENT/doctor
- Audiologist
- Health Visitor (a medical person, caring for young infants or children)
- Social Worker
- Community worker
- Residential Care worker (someone who works with Deaf people who have special extended needs - either elderly or additional problems)
- Four sign language interpreters {1:2:4}
- Teacher of young Deaf children
- Visiting Teacher of the Deaf (someone who travels to mainstream schools)
- Teacher of older Deaf children
- Parent of Deaf child (aged under 5 years)
- 4 Mothers or fathers of young Deaf or school aged child (they should come from different families)
- 4 Mothers or fathers of older Deaf, schoolchild
- 2 Mothers or fathers of Deaf person aged 16-30 years
- 16 hearing people {8:12:16} in the age groups in the table above with no previous experience of Deafness (members of the public)

By selecting this broad range of participants the nature of sign language use and the attitudes to it could be examined. The population bias in terms of numbers (ie Germany has more people than Iceland) could be more precisely dealt with in a study with a longer time scale but it was felt that the simplest design would be most effective. However, some adjustment on the numbers could be made for each partner in a planned second round of analysis.

The involvement of hearing people is of some importance here since the real impact of the European recognition of sign language would be most significant among the hearing community, in terms of providing the resource which Deaf people needed in order to develop their community at all levels. If there was little knowledge and limited acknowledgement of Deaf people, this would be an important finding to report to the European Parliament.

## Procedure

### *Preparatory Work*

In line with project plans, there were project team meetings each week. These examined different aspects of the methodology and goals of the research. There were two meetings in Brussels and the co-ordinator came from the EUD to Bristol on two occasions.

Contracts were completed finally in October 1996 and the work began in earnest at that time. Contacts were made with potential research partners at the end of October at a meeting in Austria and then again at a researcher's workshop in Holland in November.

*Project Work*

The project work proceeded relatively smoothly with steady progress along the lines set out in the approved workplan. A detailed diary of events is provided in Appendix 3.

*a: contacts with researchers*

All potential partners were contacted first in November and then again in December with a draft questionnaire. Response was varied. A number of partners were unable to take part due to the timescale and other commitments. Unfortunately, responses were not always speedy and there were uncertainties surrounding the chosen research partners. Other proposed partners had ceased to function in this field. As a result, the overall response was less than expected. New partners had to be brought in, some who had already been invited to serve on the National Committees. As a result, some of the lines between research roles of systematic data collection on a sample of people and the general role of the NCs in using the data, became blurred.

*b: contacts with NCs*

In December, all NCs were contacted and sent the draft questionnaires. This was meant to provide some initial information on the project and what it hoped to achieve. As partners were at various stages of development, this caused uncertainty for NCs in terms of the work to be carried out. Some NCs became concerned that they were to carry out the research and that the materials would be provided in English rather than in their own written language. Some clarification had to be offered. This became the pattern for interaction.

*c. pilot work in Bristol*

Four questionnaires were completed by Deaf interviewees, four for the hearing interviewees and 8 for the institutions (4 Deaf 4 hearing). This gave a total of 16 completed forms which were used to improve the format and content. The responses allowed us to analyse and alter the questions to avoid ambiguity and error. Changes were then made to the questionnaires to be used.

*d: questionnaires and plans*

Draft questionnaires sent in December produced responses from some partners and also a more detailed EUD response. All of the points raised were taken into account and revised questionnaires were prepared. These were then sent to all partners.

*e: translations*

The materials which were sent to partners are shown in the table below. Written translations were made in Bristol from English for *Dutch, German, French, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian* and *Greek*. This allowed us to cover the language needs of 10 countries (and potentially Luxembourg). Countries having to complete their own translations were Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark (and Catalonia from Spanish).

In addition, an explanatory video was prepared in International Sign<sup>8</sup>. This covered the background to the project, the aims and design of the project, the conduct of the interviews and the content of the questionnaires. This was also provided to all partners.

Table 4.2 Materials that were sent to all partners

<i>Materials</i>	<i>Status</i>
Explanatory letter	December
Contract	January
Workplan (Key Points)	January
Budget details	January
Model letter for sending to Institutions/Individuals	February
Questionnaires in English (3)	January
Questionnaires in their written language (3)	February
Video in International Sign	January
Computer disc with questionnaires in English or their own Language	February
Workshop for Deaf Researchers - details	February

Copies of all materials were also supplied to Deaf researchers at the workshop in Bristol.

*e: workshop*

The preliminary feedback and difficulties faced in the confirmation of the desired research partners suggested that a training programme would be desirable for the interviewers. Consequently it was decided to direct a component of the funding into centralised training in Bristol. This took place on 14-16<sup>th</sup> of February 1997. There were 18 Deaf participants from all the target countries (except Sweden, Denmark and Iceland). The response was exceptionally good. The workshop is the subject of a separate report (Appendix 4).

<sup>8</sup> International Sign is the term used for the inter-language that has evolved among Deaf people in contact with others from other countries. International Sign rests on a core grammar of sign languages which emphasises the iconicity and classifier components. International Sign is also negotiates a common set of lexical units or vocabulary between the participants.

## Schedule

The project schedule is shown below:

Table 4.3: Project Schedule

	<i>Project Task</i>	<i>Partners Involved</i>	<i>Time period</i>
1	Preparation of Proposal	CDS	May-June 1996
2	Agreement with partners	CDS	October-November 1996
3	Preparation of guidelines and pilot questionnaires	CDS	October-November 1996
4	Distributed pilot materials	CDS	November 1996
5	Alterations from partners	All	November 1996
6	Final materials and guidelines	CDS	December 1996
7	Circulate confirmed materials and schedule	CDS	January 1997
8	Data collection	All	February-March 1997
9	Workshop for Deaf interviewers in Bristol	All	February 14-16th
10	Return data to Bristol	All	March 1997
11	Data analysis	CDS	March-April 1997
12	Draft report	CDS	May 1997
13	Circulate report to partners	CDS	May (end) 1997
14	Comments, amendments	All	June 1997
15	Revisions and Conference Papers; Final Report for EUD	CDS	July 1997
16	Conference	All	September 1997
17	Final text and amendments where necessary as a result of EC queries	CDS	October 1997

All tasks were completed to schedule up to Task 9 and then the *other factors* came into play – responses from those sent questionnaires was slow. People who said they would respond did not. Partners ran into local logistical problems. Fortunately, to our knowledge, no questionnaires were lost. Bristol experienced difficulties where there were deviations from the original text, through local translations and where there were open responses written in the national language. These were expected, but the very tight project schedule did not allow enough time to process these sets of information in the way we wished.

### *Data Processing*

Once received, all the data was encoded. The data is not a huge set by the standards of international comparative studies. Nevertheless, it took a considerable time to check all the entries. This was done in three ways:

- By selecting individual returns and checking these against what had been entered in the computer

- By selecting whole country cohorts and re-coding *blind*. The re-coded section was then matched against the original and where there were discrepancies, the original return was investigated.
- Logical analysis of the encoded data. Where data was obviously inconsistent with the range of possible responses (eg age over 100 years) the original was investigated and the data altered appropriately.

This checking procedure took place over a period of three weeks and overlapped with the beginning of statistical analysis of the data. However, the checking was necessary to ensure the integrity of the data. Once the data was validated in this way, it was possible to begin the statistical and descriptive analysis.

## The Participants

### THOSE WHO COMPLETED THE QUESTIONNAIRES

In this chapter, we set out the information concerning the participants themselves. We also consider and make some comparison to the sample that was originally intended. It is clear that the data can be analysed in different ways - the final returns of questionnaires exceeds the original proposal by some margin (even though it was decided to aim to collect more data because there would be some shortfall as a natural feature of the process). It will be possible, at a later stage, to analyse a sub-sample which matches exactly the initial proposed returns or which is fitted more accurately to overall population size. This latter would seem like an obvious development in the analysis. For the moment, all the data received by the early part of June 1997 was included (there were questionnaires still being received into the second week of July, which could not be included in the data processing).

### The Planned Sample

Details on the planned sample and the procedures we followed, are detailed in Chapter 4. The sampling frame that was created, fitted quite well the eventual profile of Deaf people but was less accurate in other groups. In the Deaf groups there were problems with Deaf people in the rural category. Most of the sample came from towns and cities. This is consistent with a population drift of Deaf people to the cities where there are likely to be more people who can communicate with them. There were also fewer males than had been planned.

Table 5.1: Data received and encoded by early June 1997

Country	Deaf		Individual		Organisations	
	Contract <sup>9</sup>	Data	Contract	Data	Contract	Data
Austria	16	16	34	26	15	7
Belgium - Flemish	12	12	29	27	13	16
Belgium - French	12	13	29	14	13	10
Denmark	12	11	29	7	13	12
Finland	12	12	29	31	13	14
France	32	38	40	24	19	12
Germany	32	32	40	16	19	14
Greece - Athens	16	16	34	25	15	9
Greece- Thessaloniki	8	8	29	21	13	14
Iceland	8	8	24	24	13	11
Ireland	12	13	29	22	13	10
Italy <sup>10</sup>	32	10	39	14	19	19
Luxembourg	8	8	29	7	13	2
Netherlands	16	16	34	28	15	14
Norway	12	12	29	15	13	11
Portugal	16	16	34	29	15	12
Spain - Barcelona	8	8	21	21	13	12
Spain- La Coruña	4	3	21	8	13	3
Spain - Granada	4	4	21	11	13	9
Spain - Madrid	16	16	25	12	15	9
Spain - Valencia	4	3	21	10	13	4
Sweden	16	18	34	15	15	8
UK	32	32	40	37	19	19
<b>No of entries</b>	<b>340</b>	<b>325</b>	<b>694</b>	<b>454</b>	<b>335</b>	<b>251</b>

<sup>9</sup> The number in this column represents the number which was set down in the contract for interviews, for each partner.

<sup>10</sup> There was a problem with the returns from Italy. The sample of Deaf people and institutions was constructed rather slowly and the interviews were conducted very close to, and then after, the deadlines. As a result the sample is incomplete and it may not be representative of the whole of Italy as was intended. Some care must be taken in interpreting the results from Italy.

In the Institutions and Organisations group there were problems because certain Centres did not exist. These were in the following categories:

- College with special work/support for Deaf students (6 missing out of 23 research partners)
- Institution for Deaf people with mental health problems (7/23)
- Home for elderly Deaf people (6/23)
- Audiology Department (4/23) – although this was probably as a result of non-response rather than non-existence
- Media location for Deaf people (4/23)
- Department of Health or Labour with a responsibility for Deaf people (8/23) - again this maybe more to do with lack of contact and non response rather than non-existence.

In the case of the individuals, a number of groups were more difficult – health visitors (working with young children), workers in homes for the elderly. The other missing cases were distributed throughout and there was no fixed pattern.

*Deaf Respondents*

In terms of the simple features of the sample the following information was found:

Table 5.2: Characteristics of Deaf Participants in the sample in each country

Country	Male %	Married %	Total	Average Age(yrs)
Austria	50	81	16	46.20
Belgium	44	56	25	44.88
Denmark	55	55	11	45.45
Finland	50	50	12	44.67
France	55	47	38	42.74
Germany	44	69	32	45.41
Greece	46	54	24	44.04
Iceland	38	63	8	44.63
Ireland	54	69	13	41.46
Italy	40	70	10	45.40
Luxembourg	38	25	8	42.00
Netherlands	50	75	16	45.94
Norway	50	42	12	47.33
Portugal	50	63	16	44.69
Spain	47	74	34	45.29
Sweden	44	67	18	46.22
UK	47	56	32	45.47
<i>Total</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>61</i>	<i>325</i>	<i>44.80</i>

This set of figures deviates a little from the hoped for equal numbers of men and women, with some discrepancies in countries such as Iceland, Luxembourg and Italy. However, a sample with 48% males is biased to a small extent.

When Kyle and Allsop (1982) surveyed Deaf people they found that 65% were married (as compared to 75% of hearing people). This figure of 61% overall, in this survey, is similar to what might be expected. The sampling here has meant that the Deaf chosen in Italy, Netherlands, Spain and Austria are more likely to be married than elsewhere.

The numbers of Deaf people who have one parent Deaf is considerably higher than would be expected from a random sample. Less than 10% of the Deaf population are thought to have both parents Deaf. In this sample, 17% have one parent Deaf and this is even higher in Finland (42%), and higher than average in Ireland, Belgium, and France. It has been pointed out that there was a tendency for the Deaf interviewers to choose interviewees who were more close to the centre of the community. This would be a natural trend in any study of a minority group and does not constitute a huge problem. However, it would be consistent with a larger than usual representation of those from Deaf families and this seems to be the case here.

The age distribution deviates a little from what would be expected, with Norway, Sweden and Austria being older. Ireland has the youngest sample but the individual country respondents are clustered around the same mean value (44.8 years).

Although we attempted to collect information on the location of the individuals who responded, in the event it was not possible to determine with accuracy whether the criteria for rural versus city could be met. Without extensive discussion with the partners it would not be possible to verify the status. We believe that it is highly likely that far more city respondents were included than rural respondents. There was a varied pattern of employment according to the returns.

• Table 5.3: Employment Pattern<sup>11</sup> of Deaf respondents(%)

Country	JOB %			TOTAL
	ABC1	C2DE	N/E	
Austria	19	38	44	16
Belgium	16	44	40	25
Denmark	0	36	64	11
Finland	8	33	58	12
France	15	24	61	33
Germany	6	16	78	32
Greece	21	21	58	24
Iceland	25	38	38	8
Ireland	17	58	25	12
Italy	40	0	60	10
Luxembourg	0	25	75	8
Netherlands	25	19	56	16
Norway	0	25	75	12
Portugal	7	64	29	14
Spain	6	41	53	34
Sweden	28	44	28	18
UK	3	22	75	32
<i>Grand Total</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>31</i>	<i>56</i>	<i>317</i>
	30	70		

The final figures for the whole of the European sample were similar to what might have been predicted for a modern European society – 13% of the Deaf respondents held jobs in the upper socio-economic groups (professional, managerial, office work) while a further 31% had lower socio-economic positions in jobs involving manual work. Of the people not in the workforce, 22% were retired from work, 4% were unemployed and 9% were students. We have used the category, “not in employment” to include all those who are not working more than half time, for whatever reason.

When we consider only those in work, 9% were in professional or managerial posts, while the largest group were in manual trades (34%). When asked about their pay, 6% thought it was above average, 66% claimed average and 25% said it was below what hearing people earned.

It is not possible to claim this is a random sample of the Deaf population and it bears all the hallmarks of an opportunity sample. This is not surprising given the lack of time available for training and for the completion of the interviews. When we consider the match of the returned interviews with what had been set as the frame, there are considerable deviations. It was simply not possible to control the sampling from a distance.

<sup>11</sup> A, B and C1 are the classifications for *professional, managerial* and *white collar* (office) occupations; C2, D and E are for *skilled manual, semi-skilled* and *un-skilled* jobs.

## Responses from Institutions

In the second group, questionnaires were translated and sent to a list of named people - the target list set out above. The aim was to obtain responses from centres, organisations and institutions that had an interest and involvement with Deafness.

The response rate was lower than planned but the research partners were dealing with factors beyond their control. Depending on whether they could follow up on non-returns (this could be difficult if the researcher was Deaf and the respondent was hearing or in a different part of the country), there was likely to be a greater or lesser final tally. A total of 48% returns were obtained. This affects the overall sampling frame (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Gender, hearing status, and age for respondents from organisations

Country	Male %	Deaf	Age	Returns
Austria	71	29	42.71	7
Belgium	71	16	42.04	26
Denmark	42	8	46.17	12
Finland	43	14	44.93	14
France	67	17	46.42	12
Germany	36	21	43.07	14
Greece	55	18	39.52	23
Iceland	36	10	41.73	11
Ireland	78	20	45.11	10
Italy	44	22	52.47	19
Luxembourg	0	50	34.00	2
Netherlands	43	29	44.46	14
Norway	64	18	43.45	11
Portugal	58	17	42.08	12
Spain	47	14	37.91	37
Sweden	38	13	49.75	8
UK	47	20	43.64	18
Grand Total	51	18	43.29	250

As with the sample of Deaf respondents, the proportion of males (51%) is close to what was desired. There are quite considerable variations in the country responses - although some of the ranges were due to the small numbers of returns from some countries, e.g. Luxembourg (2), Austria (7), and Sweden (8). A considerable number were Deaf themselves (18%). Average age was similar to the Deaf sample.

In terms of employment status and pay, the group were in the upper regions of socio-economic status.

Table 5.5 shows the occupational status of those who replied from each institution. Although we might desire them to be similar, there are different employment levels among the respondents from the organisations. These in turn, vary from the details of the Deaf people and also from the *individuals* group.

Table 5.5: Working status and pay

Country	Full-time worker %	ABC1	C2DE	Not Employed	Returns
Austria	57	83	17	0	7
Belgium	68	83	9	9	26
Denmark	67	100	0	0	12
Finland	71	71	29	0	14
France	73	82	9	9	12
Germany	79	93	0	7	14
Greece	59	86	5	9	23
Iceland	73	91	9	0	11
Ireland	78	90	0	10	10
Italy	42	71	0	24	19
Luxembourg	100	100	0	0	2
Netherlands	57	85	8	8	14
Norway	100	100	0	0	11
Portugal	58	92	8	0	12
Spain	64	91	9	0	37
Sweden	75	88	13	0	8
UK	93	93	7	0	18
Grand Total	69	87	7	5	250

The majority were full-time workers (69%) and the vast majority were professionals. This is not especially surprising as the target group was the organisation and service sector for Deaf people. Since most were hearing, the salary levels tended to be higher with 32% reporting above average pay levels and only 14% saying that they earned less than the average.

One interesting statistic is the salary received by Deaf people. While the questionnaires were sent to institutions, they were completed by individuals. Most were professionals. However, there is quite a disparity between the average pay reported by Deaf respondents (institutions) and by the hearing respondents (Table 5.6)

Table 5.6: Deaf-hearing disparity in pay (%)

Respondents	Above average pay	Below average pay
Deaf	18	36
Hearing	34	10

## Responses from Hearing Individuals

As with the questionnaire to institutions, the questionnaire to individuals was translated and sent to the individuals who matched the sampling criteria. As for institutions, the response rate was lower than expected. Fifty-one percent of those contacted were able to return the questionnaire.

Table 5.7: Gender, hearing status, and age for individuals

Country	Male %	Hearing %	Deaf Parents%	Age (yrs)
Austria	23	100	4	41.12
Belgium	40	94	2	42.64
Denmark	57	100	0	43.14
Finland	81	94	3	43.23
France	40	92	0	42.88
Germany	44	88	0	41.50
Greece	35	100	7	38.43
Iceland	50	92	0	43.83
Ireland	55	95	0	37.86
Italy	21	93	21	37.86
Luxembourg	57	14 <sup>12</sup>	0	43.71
Netherlands	50	93	4	43.59
Norway	53	93	7	44.93
Portugal	18	96	10	28.89
Spain	31	67	8	39.43
Sweden	24	94	18	41.38
UK	41	100	5	42.65
Grand Total	40	90	5	40.63

In this sample, the percentage of males responding drops to 40% with relatively small numbers in Italy, Portugal, and Sweden. This is probably due to a number of factors such as the network of contacts of the researcher, the likelihood of people responding and the fact that for example, parents of a Deaf child who responded were more likely to be women. Of the respondents, 10% were Deaf or hard-of hearing. This figure may be a slight distortion and over-estimation, as there were apparent difficulties in translating the terms *Deaf*, *hard-of-hearing* and *partially-hearing* and this led to an over-inclusion in the question of people with relatively minor hearing losses. The figure for the number of those with Deaf relatives is close to what one would predict in this field. Ninety to ninety-five percent of Deaf marriages produce hearing children. It seems that the distribution of people who have a connection with Deaf people seems to reflect this.

Age tends to fall in the same range and hovers around the same mean value as in the *Deaf* sample and in the *organisations* group. The Portuguese group is much younger than the others, which is due to the over-inclusion of "students" in the sample (who are classed in the unemployed group).

<sup>12</sup> Most questionnaires were not answered in this question from this country.

Table 5.8: Working Status and pay – Individuals

Country	ABC1	C2DE	Not Employed	Returns
Austria	36	16	48	26
Belgium	53	6	40	48
Denmark	71	14	14	7
Finland	48	26	26	31
France	35	26	39	24
Germany	63	19	19	16
Greece	45	14	41	46
Iceland	46	38	17	24
Ireland	55	14	32	22
Italy	50	0	50	14
Luxembourg	50	17	33	7
Netherlands	50	25	25	28
Norway	53	13	33	15
Portugal	34	0	66	29
Spain	56	10	34	62
Sweden	69	19	13	17
UK	73	3	24	37
Grand Total	52	14	34	453

The profile of this group is dominated by professional and white collar workers, although not to the same extent as the Institutions group. Just over one third are not in the workforce, although this means there are a larger number of retired respondents.

Taken as a whole the sample constitutes an opportunity sample and cannot be seen as a random representation of the population as a whole. The techniques for this are available but given the time constraints, the sampling frame was followed as far as was possible. The responses, which will be analysed in the following chapters, will offer a great deal of insight into attitudes and experiences in Europe today.

## Deaf Views

### Perspectives from the interviews with Deaf people

In this chapter, we report on the results from the Deaf participants who took part in the interviews. The data includes all the valid returns as received by early June 1997.

### General Points

We asked people about their time in school and the outcomes.

Of the sample, 17% were still living at home, although 61% had set up their own home with a partner or children. The vast majority had been to a Deaf school at some time in their school career, although there were some variations from country to country. We would predict that being a member of the Deaf community correlated highly with Deaf school attendance. These figures are not surprising.

Table 6.1: School attended (total figures do not all reach 100% because of incomplete information)

	Deaf School for some part of career	Hearing School	Returns
Austria	88	13	16
Belgium	76	24	25
Denmark	73	27	11
Finland	100	0	12
France	58	37	38
Germany	88	3	32
Greece	88	8	24
Iceland	100	0	8
Ireland	92	8	13
Italy	60	40	10
Luxembourg	100	0	8
Netherlands	75	19	16
Norway	75	25	12
Portugal	69	31	16
Spain	68	32	34
Sweden	94	6	18
UK	78	22	32
Grand Total	78	19	325

In terms of the schooling, more people attended day schools, but there are quite large country variations. Denmark's Deaf children are more likely to go to a local school, while Irish children are likely to be residential (boarding at school).

Table 6.2 Aspects of Schooling

	Day Schools %	School in home town %	Age Started school (years)
Austria	44	19	6.44
Belgium	48	46	3.67
Denmark	91	45	6.73
Finland	25	17	6.50
France	60	51	5.43
Germany	60	41	6.50
Greece	48	52	8.30
Iceland	50	75	5.00
Ireland	15	23	5.15
Italy	60	30	6.10
Luxembourg	29	13	5.75
Netherlands	56	0	3.81
Norway	42	42	7.33
Portugal	60	94	6.06
Spain	59	58	5.20
Sweden	65	44	7.11
UK	63	56	4.19
Grand Total	54	45	5.73

There are also differences in terms of the age at which they began primary education. Latest starters seem to be Greece, Sweden and Norway, with Belgium and the Netherlands allowing children into school earliest. One has to treat these figures with some care, as the meaning of school is different from one country to another. There may be provision from children in many countries from 3 years, but it may be optional or it may given another name such as kindergarten. The results should be taken as only a guide.

Table 6.3: Deaf School and Residential Status

	Deaf School	Hearing School
Day school	46.8	85
Residential School	53.2	15
	100%	100%

As might be predicted, Deaf schools were more likely to be residential, but this is a varying feature across Europe and the slight majority of boarding placements is only the centre of a broad range.

## Deaf People's Communication

A crucial aspect to understand is the way Deaf people think about their own language. For most Deaf people in Europe their communication has been denigrated for all of their lives. At the very least, hearing people have ignored it and, in the worst cases, they have punished Deaf people for its use. Deaf people will remember their parents asking them not to sign in public and even Deaf parents may have been reluctant to sign openly. Until the 1970s there was no systematic research and Deaf people continued to use their own language in circumstances which did not receive any approval or

recognition. The concept of language was presented to Deaf people as associated with the spoken and written language of their communities. In education, language was what was used by the majority hearing society. Deaf people were language impaired. Not surprisingly, the first attempts by linguists to re-name the communication as language and to offer new acronyms such as LSF, BSL and so on were not necessarily understood by Deaf people. The fact that the process was instigated by hearing people did not make it any more acceptable.

It is important to understand this backdrop to the discussion, as it is not obvious, when one talks about minority languages that the people who use the language, have not had access to a majority language and that the suppression of their own language is recent and, in some cases, continuing. The terminology is an issue. Unfortunately, there are difficulties in equating what Deaf people sign about their language and what the written language form is. This turns out to be a difficult issue and proved problematic in developing the research with the partners. In this section we asked people about the sign they used to describe their communication and about the word they used. There are major difficulties in making clear to the participants, the distinctions between sign language and sign supported English. The problem is made worse by the need for translation in written language. The distinctions were explained to the Deaf interviewers although we believe there still to have been difficulties in the interviews.

Table 6.4 (a) How do Deaf people communicate in your country  
(b) what is your word for the communication? (%)

Country	(a) SIGN		(b) Word	
	Signing	Sign Language	Signing	Sign Language
Austria	31	56	50	31
Belgium	36	56	68	28
Denmark	55	36	9	91
Finland	75	25	67	33
France	49	35	38	43
Germany	41	53	34	50
Greece	54	21	58	25
Iceland	0	88	0	100
Ireland	42	42	17	75
Italy	60	0	40	20
Luxembourg	0	75	13	75
Netherlands	13	31	31	0
Norway	92	8	100	0
Portugal	6	88	6	69
Spain		56		59
Sweden	22	78	6	94
UK	47	50	47	44
Total	36	49	35	47

We asked this question to all of the groups in the study. It was our belief that Deaf people described their communication as "SIGNING," which is a sign recognisable in all sign languages in Europe. It does not equate directly to SIGN-LANGUAGE which is a

more recent invention and is consistent with the new status of the language. It is politically and linguistically correct to present Deaf people's communication as sign language but it is also true that older Deaf people will not have experienced the effects of the change. The concept of language becomes appropriate for anyone when they are aware of other languages. In the past, this meant that Deaf people viewed the spoken language as language and what Deaf people did as not-language. We hoped that in the 1990s this would have changed.

The questions in this section were designed to deal with these distinctions. They were less than satisfactory because of difficulties in translation and because some of the Deaf associations objected to the idea that what Deaf people could be using was *signing*, rather than sign *language*. In some cases, eg Spain, the idea of signing was removed from the questions by the local researchers. In Nordic countries, the name for sign is of older origin and perhaps does not figure in this debate at all. These points have distorted the responses to the questionnaire and mean that there is an inherent problem in determining language status. Although we can propose that sign language is a more advanced concept than signing or gesture language, it is hard to know if official policy of Deaf associations is over-riding the natural terminology of Deaf people. Such a situation would be very interesting, if Deaf people used an informal sign for their communication while, at the political level, it was important to designate signing as a language. In this research, it is not really possible to determine the precise meaning assigned to Deaf people's communication by each of the interviewees. In addition, it is the role of the National Committees to promote the concept of sign language whereas, in the nature of this research, the priority is to determine how Deaf people view the way they communicate with each other. At times, these roles contradict one another.

Table 6.4 indicates that the preference is for the language definition overall but the points above limit the strength of the conclusion.

In each country, different words are used to refer to the language. The most common terms that Deaf people supplied, are found in Table 6.5.

Table 6.5 Words used to label sign communication  
(these are the labels provided by Deaf interviewees)

Austria	Osterreichische Gebärdensprache
Belgium	Flemish Sign Language; LSB Langue des Signes Belges (francophones)
Denmark	Dansk Tegnsprog
Finland	Viittomakieli
France	LSF
Germany	Deutsche Gebärdensprache
Greece	GSL (note: font problems in writing Greek)
Iceland	No name given
Ireland	ISL
Italy	Lingua dei Segni Italiana
Luxembourg	LBG; Zeichensprache
Netherlands	Nederlandse gebarentaal
Norway	Norsk tegnspråk
Portugal	Lingua Gestual Portuguesa
Spain	Llengua de Signes de Catalunya; Lengua de Signos Espanola
Sweden	Svenskt teckenspråk
UK	British Sign Language

Clearly each language name has different origins depending on culture, experience and recency of the naming. The World Federation of the Deaf has developed the policy of accepting the name used by each national Deaf association without question or comment. However, it is interesting to be aware of the language status which may be conferred to hearing people, by the terminology which is used in public in each country.

In terms of action in favour of sign language recognition, there had been some support for action. Among the Deaf interviewees, 22% had signed a petition, only 7% had written a letter, while 27% had marched on the streets. Less than 5% had organised courses or training. Twenty-eight percent had been involved in other activities, although 21% had never been involved in anything in support of sign language. Nineteen percent had been involved in more than one type of activity. It is hard to know if this constitutes a community mobilising or not, but the numbers of activists seem low. It would appear that there has been no co-ordinated activity or campaign to achieve the recognition of sign language in Europe. There is no evidence of an upsurge in awareness raising activities as a consequence of the European statement on sign languages in 1988.

### Signing in School

When asked about the teaching in school, relatively few had experienced sign language in use by their teachers all the time. Overall, less than a quarter of the respondents had teachers signing throughout their time in the school which they attended for the longest time (even taking out the people who attended hearing schools, the percentage does not change). In Portugal and Germany, more than two thirds of the respondents had teachers who never signed to them. In the UK, the Netherlands and Denmark, the

situation was almost the same. The majority of these Deaf people experienced oralist regimes in their schooling. The question of which teachers signed is complex, as we can imagine that Deaf people had some teachers who signed and some who did not. Nevertheless, the interviews were designed to identify the average teacher communication situation. Entries in the "never" column (Table 6.6) are taken to imply that no teachers signed.

Table 6.6: Did your teachers sign to you (%)

	All the time	Outside the classroom	Rarely	Never
Austria	25	13	31	31
Belgium	20	24	24	32
Denmark	27	9	9	55
Finland	25	8	33	33
France	21	16	24	39
Germany	0	0	32	68
Greece	48	13	26	13
Iceland	38	0	25	38
Ireland	46	0	15	38
Italy	70	10	10	10
Luxembourg	0	38	63	0
Netherlands	13	19	13	56
Norway	42	42	17	0
Portugal	19	0	13	69
Spain	21	12	21	47
Sweden	39	22	17	22
UK	9	9	22	59
Total	24	13	23	40

An interesting division of the data was according to the age of the interviewees now. This allowed us to make comparisons of Deaf people up to the age of 40 years and over the age of 40 years. The first group will have left school after 1975, the second group will have been in school prior to 1975. Around this time, sign language was first being described and Total Communication was taking hold in the USA. In each country we can say that older or younger Deaf people are more likely to have had signing teachers. We should hope for an improvement in that younger people were more likely to have had teachers who signed. The pattern is mixed. Countries where Deaf people are more likely, since 1975, to have teachers who signed are

*Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden, UK.*

In some countries, the situation had deteriorated, where Deaf people under the age of 40 years have experienced less signing than those over 40 years: *Austria, Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Spain.* In Luxembourg, no change was reported.

However, despite these circumstances of reduced communication in sign from their teachers, Deaf people signed to each other whenever possible (Table 6.7). The situation is complicated by the fact that there are regional variations in educational policy. For

example, there are no residential schools for the Deaf in Catalonia (all closed over 10 years ago) whereas there are such schools in the other reporting regions of Spain. Our figures have to be seen in the light of these factors, which may not be evident in the overall analysis.

Table 6.7 Use of sign with other Deaf children

	All the time	Outside the classroom	Rarely	Never
Austria	38	50	6	6
Belgium	68	28	0	4
Denmark	36	36	9	18
Finland	42	58	0	0
France	61	25	3	11
Germany	34	53	9	3
Greece	87	0	9	4
Iceland	100	0	0	0
Ireland	85	8	8	0
Italy	80	10	0	10
Luxembourg	88	13	0	0
Netherlands	38	25	25	13
Norway	92	8	0	0
Portugal	56	38	0	6
Spain	59	24	3	15
Sweden	56	39	0	6
UK	38	50	0	13
Total	58	30	4	7

We can see that Deaf children are much more likely to sign to each other in the class and outside (Table 6.8) than they are to receive sign from their teachers. Exceptions to this are the respondents in Italy and Norway.

Table 6.8 Comparison of signing by teacher and with others (%)

Use of signing in class or outside	Teachers	Other children
Austria	38	88
Belgium	44	96
Denmark	36	72
Finland	33	100
France	47	86
Germany	0	87
Greece	61	87
Iceland	38	100
Ireland	46	93
Italy	80	90
Luxembourg	38	91
Netherlands	32	63
Norway	84	100
Portugal	19	94
Spain	33	83
Sweden	61	95
UK	18	88
Total	37	88

## Signing Experience

We asked people when and where they had first seen sign language and a range of other questions about experiences. It is a rather strange question to ask, *when did you first encounter your native language?* For the majority language users in a community, the reply is likely to be *from birth*. Even in oppressed minority groups, the family are likely to ensure the preservation of their culture by using the language at home with infants. The reality for Deaf people is quite different. Deaf children come to language and to the process of learning the language much later than do hearing children. This is of great significance to well-being and later development. It is of course, an indicator of status of the language.

Table 6.9 When was sign language first seen? (%)

	<5years	<10 years	In school	After leaving school
Austria	31	56	0	13
Belgium	60	28	8	4
Denmark	55	36	9	0
Finland	58	42	0	0
France	58	26	3	13
Germany	47	38	16	0
Greece	21	50	21	8
Iceland	75	25	0	0
Ireland	58	42	0	0
Italy	60	20	10	10
Luxembourg	63	38	0	0
Netherlands	50	13	6	31
Norway	33	50	17	0
Portugal	19	81	0	0
Spain	35	41	9	15
Sweden	72	28	0	0
UK	55	26	13	6
Total	48	37	8	7

Most people claimed to have seen sign language before they had left school, which is a likely finding; however, there were larger numbers in the Netherlands (31%) who had not experienced signing until after leaving school. This is probably consistent with the strong oralist stance, which had been taken in education in the Netherlands until very recently. Since nearly all Deaf children attended one school which had a very rigorous system of forbidding signing and which also had a profound hold on parents, not surprisingly, Deaf people did not meet on their own terms until after school. Although the oralist position was taken in other countries, it does not seem to have had such a major impact. As pointed out before, regional variations in policy have an impact on the results of this table. We do not have the fine detail on each participant's early schooling to be able to assign it to a region with stronger or weaker oralist policies. However, the overall pattern is worrying. Less than half of the Deaf community members experienced

their own native language before the age of five years. The majority of respondents claimed to have seen sign first at school (Table 6.10).

Table 6.10 Where was signing first seen (%)

	At home	At school	At a club	Other place
Austria	0	87	13	0
Belgium	24	64	8	4
Denmark	18	73	0	9
Finland	33	58	0	8
France	24	68	5	3
Germany	21	54	0	25
Greece	4	88	0	8
Iceland	13	88	0	0
Ireland	33	67	0	0
Italy	10	60	20	10
Luxembourg	29	71	0	0
Netherlands	6	63	25	6
Norway	8	83	0	8
Portugal	19	69	13	0
Spain	15	67	6	12
Sweden	47	47	0	6
UK	10	61	19	10
Total	18	67	7	8

The only group which differed in its pattern was Germany, where a quarter of people claimed to have seen signing first in another (unspecified - kindergarten? assessment centre?) place. Just over half had first seen signing at school. When asked the more precise question of when they had learned to sign, the results were consistent with Table 6.9. The calculated correlation was 0.74 which is highly significant statistically.

Table 6.11 Age when sign was learned

	< 5 years	6-10 years	11-18 years	19 years +
Austria	38	50	6	6
Belgium	64	24	12	0
Denmark	45	27	27	0
Finland	42	58	0	0
France	45	26	24	5
Germany	34	56	9	0
Greece	4	48	43	4
Iceland	50	38	13	0
Ireland	25	58	8	8
Italy	10	60	20	10
Luxembourg	13	50	25	13
Netherlands	38	19	13	31
Norway	33	58	8	0
Portugal	13	44	44	0
Spain	21	53	12	15
Sweden	56	44	0	0
UK	47	38	9	6
Total	35	43	16	6

## Use of sign language

We asked people their views on their own use of signing. Nearly all claimed to be good signers, although almost one in five of those in the Netherlands, said they were not good signers. This can be seen as consistent with the late learning of sign. Significantly in Sweden, where there has been legislation on sign language, the Deaf respondents all felt their signing was good. Norwegian Deaf people were almost as confident. Larger numbers in Greece, Portugal and Finland were less convinced. We believe these findings to indicate the general suppression of the language and the lack of opportunity for use.

Table 6.12 Are you a good signer?

	Good with many signs	Good with some signs	Not a good signer
Austria	50	50	0
Belgium	72	28	0
Denmark	82	18	0
Finland	42	58	0
France	82	11	8
Germany	78	22	0
Greece	33	63	4
Iceland	50	50	0
Ireland	83	17	0
Italy	40	50	10
Luxembourg	50	38	13
Netherlands	63	19	19
Norway	92	8	0
Portugal	31	56	13
Spain	50	38	13
Sweden	100	0	0
UK	68	26	6
Total	64	30	5

Although people generally believe they are good signers, there is some insecurity about understanding people from other parts of the country (Table 6.13). Although Deaf people are mobile, there tends to be greater variation in sign (than in speech) and, when asked a general question about understanding other people, Deaf people often appear to be unsure.

In person to person contact, the communication may proceed normally but there remains insecurity about language variation, ie Deaf people from other areas may not be understood when signing. In Table 6.13, we see that Deaf people in some countries seem to be less secure about understanding others who live 100kms distant:

Belgium, Greece, Ireland, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, and Spain each had less than 50% of respondents who claimed to be always able to understand people from 100 kms away. This may relate to general mobility of Deaf people in these countries or to real dialect differences. It would require more fine-grained analysis.

Table 6.13 Do you always understand someone from your town/someone from a town 100kms away? (%)

	Own Town	100Kms
Austria	88	69
Belgium	88	40
Denmark	100	82
Finland	67	67
France	65	66
Germany	94	81
Greece	83	42
Iceland	38	N/R
Ireland	58	25
Italy	90	60
Luxembourg	13	25
Netherlands	63	25
Norway	50	33
Portugal	69	44
Spain	62	44
Sweden	100	89
UK	84	58
Total	75	55

Even in the question about understanding people in their own town, over 40% of Irish Deaf people and 50% of Norwegian people said that they did not always understand the other Deaf person.

### Patterns of Language Use

We asked a series of questions about where, when and with whom, sign language was used, on the basis that we can predict that, for hearing people, spoken language would be used all of the time and in all places. We combined the responses to the questions listed under No. 33 (see Appendix 1 – Interview for Deaf people). The predicted score for hearing people would be close to the minimum of 11 (ie 11 questions with the value 1, meaning that speech was used with other hearing people in those situations for more than one hour everyday). Deaf people are likely to use sign much less, as there are fewer opportunities - they do not work with other Deaf people most of the time and they do not live next door to other Deaf people and so on. There are likely to be major implications of this reduced opportunity for use of the native language. On the one hand, Deaf people are likely to have less opportunity to apply the language and thereby to develop it through interaction; and, on the other hand, they are more likely to prize the times when it is possible to use the language free from external pressures. It has also the negative implication that Deaf people who are entering the community will take longer to master the language as they have fewer opportunities to use it in groups. In the comparison between countries in Table 6.14, we should bear in mind the considerable individual difference in language use and opportunities for interaction with other Deaf people. Nevertheless, we can suggest some implications of the differences which we discovered.

Table 6.14 How often the language is used in each country, with different people  
(minimum 11; max 44) Low score means **more** use of sign language

Austria	30.38
Belgium	26.80
Denmark	25.55
Finland	25.25
France	17.63
Germany	23.03
Greece	22.21
Iceland	22.88
Ireland	20.77
Italy	21.30
Luxembourg	19.75
Netherlands	32.81
Norway	27.00
Portugal	29.19
Spain	20.88
Sweden	16.22
UK	22.31
Total	23.19

The overall picture places Deaf people mostly in the category that signing is not used everyday and in many situations is only used sometimes. Sweden and France report the greatest levels of use, implying that Deaf people are signing everyday. In contrast, Austria and Netherlands responses imply that signing is used only some days. Although there are these country differences, the main differences are between individuals since there is wide variation within each country. One can speculate on why Portugal and the Netherlands have relatively higher scores and link this to the early education experiences and the lack of early sign but it should be stressed that this supports the difference in the sample only. It is hard to make strong statements about the whole Deaf community in that country.

Nevertheless, we need to probe the situation when a language is not used extensively and is not used professionally, in business or in commerce. One of the key points which becomes apparent later in the study is that Deaf people believe the language should be used much more extensively in everyday life. However, on the evidence of current use, hearing people tend to see sign language as a support system only. There are major problems which arise from this finding.

Table 6.15 Means of Communicating with friends and family (%)

	Signing	Speaking	Sign+ speak	Gesture	Write	Speech+ other	Sign+ other	TC
Mother	20.37	39.63	20.37	6.30	1.48	7.78	0.37	3.70
Father	19.23	47.86	14.96	4.70	2.99	4.27	0.85	3.85
Partner	83.91	4.78	10.00					1.30
Children	34.38	16.67	40.63	4.17		1.04	1.04	1.56
Sibling	28.62	33.70	23.55	4.35	1.09	4.71	1.81	2.17
Relative	8.63	52.16	17.27	7.19	3.60	7.19	0.72	3.24
Deaf school friend	87.84	2.36	7.77	1.35		0.34		0.34
Other friend	87.58	0.32	9.87	1.27			0.32	0.64
Hearing friend	6.06	40.74	23.57	6.40	6.06	10.10	1.68	5.39
Hearing at work	13.98	37.29	17.80	5.08	5.51	11.02	0.42	8.90
Strangers	0.63	38.17	3.47	7.57	17.67	23.03	1.26	8.20

One of the issues which has to be examined is the choice of communication with other people. In Table 6.15, we set out the responses to questions of choice of communication. The categories, *Speech + other* and *Sign + other*, refer to the set of combinations which Deaf people listed. These could include signing with another aspect or speech with another aspect.

This set of figures is mostly as one would predict, with the biggest differences being that interaction with partner is nearly always in sign, while interaction with children is more likely to involve speaking and signing. Interestingly, 1 in 6 Deaf people say that they use speech only with their children. There is also the possibility to use speaking and signing with people and over 40% use this mode with their children. This raises the interesting question about the mode of communication at home. If most of the interaction with partner is in sign but the major part of communication with children involves speech, there must be a great deal of code-switching happening at home. This is quite consistent with other research work that we have conducted. The language environment of Deaf people is often under a great deal of pressure and this is apparent even in the home. In most minority communities, the parents choose the language at home and this is used with all the children and for all interaction. In the case of Deaf people, they create division early on in terms of their own Deaf identity and the perceived status of their hearing children. The language environment for Deaf people increases in complexity.

Virtually all communication with hearing people is in speech or some speech combination, which seems understandable. It is Deaf people who make the major adjustments when hearing and Deaf meet together.

Table 6.16: How do people communicate with you? (%)

	Signing	Speaking	Sign+ speak	Gesture	Write	Speech+ other	Sign+ other	TC
Mother	21.27	44.78	14.55	5.22	1.12	11.57	0.37	1.12
Father	19.66	50.43	11.54	5.13	1.71	9.40		1.28
Partner	84.91	5.17	6.90	1.29		0.43	0.43	0.86
Children	38.83	15.43	35.11	4.26		2.66		3.72
Sibling	29.64	35.36	19.64	3.93	0.71	6.43	1.07	2.50
Relative	9.06	58.33	10.87	6.16	2.90	7.61	0.72	3.62
Deaf school friend	88.89	2.36	6.73	1.35			0.34	0.34
Other friend	88.22	0.64	8.28	1.27			0.96	0.64
Hearing friend	7.26	43.89	15.18	9.24	5.28	9.90	0.99	7.59
Hearing at work	12.55	36.82	17.57	7.11	5.86	11.30	0.42	7.95
Strangers	0.32	45.19	2.56	6.09	16.03	24.04	0.96	4.81

The pattern is confirmed in the corresponding table (Table 6.16) which deals with the question of how people communicate with the Deaf person. Deaf people are signed to by their partners (who will usually be Deaf themselves) and by Deaf friends, but hardly ever by anyone else. Strikingly, hearing friends do not make a switch to learn sign language – Deaf people are spoken to by hearing friends.

There is a clear dualism or bilingualism. With other Deaf people, the Deaf person uses sign more than 85% of the time; with hearing people, the figure drops to less than 13% and even their own children sign to Deaf people only in 38% of the cases. This would be a very surprising figure for any other minority groups of parents.

## The Status of Sign Language

The first question in this section asked about the different locations in which signing was used (Q36). A low score over all the different situations (Deaf schools, television, Deaf clubs etc) indicated that sign was rated as used most often. Again, if we applied the question to spoken language, we would expect the results to be close to the minimum value of 8 - spoken language is used all of the time. However, the same is not true for Deaf people using sign language and there are also different opportunities and extents of use in different countries. Table 6.17 indicates the differences which place Sweden ahead of the others, in terms of everyday use of sign language.

Table 6.17 The extent of sign language use in different "Deaf" settings  
 - schools, TV, Deaf clubs)  
 (minimum=8; maximum=40) Lower means *more* use of sign

Country	Sign use
Austria	19.38
Belgium	17.72
Denmark	16.64
Finland	18.75
France	22.53
Germany	18.69
Greece	18.96
Iceland	17.63
Ireland	15.00
Italy	21.50
Luxembourg	24.75
Netherlands	19.44
Norway	17.42
Portugal	20.00
Spain	20.68
Sweden	13.56
UK	16.81
Total	18.90

Sweden (out in front by a considerable margin), Ireland, Denmark and the UK have the lowest scores, indicating that sign language is used more often in those countries than in others. Least use of sign language is in France, Italy, Spain and Portugal, in that order. The figure for Luxembourg is higher than these but there are a small number of people reporting.

We asked about which people in the country, used sign language (Q41) – officials, teachers, social workers, priests, Deaf people, interpreters and so on - and combined the values into an overall score for each country (Table 6.18). Again we find that Sweden leads Denmark, with the UK and Norway in the next places. These values represent the numbers of people who have sign language skills and so, this tends to work against smaller countries (such as Iceland, Luxembourg). However, Sweden, Denmark and Norway all have small populations and these results indicate high levels of use of sign language in public life. As before, France seems to be worst off for people who can sign, followed by Greece and Austria.

Table 6.18 Rating of the numbers of specific professionals who are sign language users (minimum=17; maximum=85) Lower means more use of sign

Country	Sign users
Austria	54.21
Belgium	52.96
Denmark	39.00
Finland	44.27
France	53.62
Germany	45.71
Greece	54.75
Iceland	58.50
Ireland	51.00
Italy	51.44
Luxembourg	64.17
Netherlands	50.75
Norway	44.75
Portugal	53.63
Spain	50.36
Sweden	35.82
UK	43.66
Total	49.24

These figures are to be compared with the values which would be found if we applied them to the majority spoken language. The values would be the minimum, ie that language is used by all professionals. We can speculate how other minority spoken languages would fare. It is likely that their results would be affected by factors, such as whether they lived together in one area, whether they had their own schools and so on. What is becoming clear, however, is that *Deaf people have considerably less opportunity to use and to see others use, their own sign language.* This situation is more marked than we might have hoped for in a modern society, with respect for culture and minority status.

In Table 6.19, we combine responses to questions about the extent of sign language in public life. This is taken from question 38 in Appendix 1 (Deaf). People were asked if there was a law about sign language, a school which used signing, a TV programme for Deaf people, videotapes in sign language, training programmes in sign, and so on. The results fit with those in the last two tables, with Sweden out in front in terms of the extent of sign language presence in organisations and institutions. As before, Norway occupies second position.

Table 6.19 Extent of sign language use in a range of institutions (Q38 – Deaf interviews) (min=0; max=21) Higher values mean more use of sign

Country	Extent
Austria	7.00
Belgium	9.00
Denmark	14.73
Finland	12.92
France	7.79
Germany	12.50
Greece	6.25
Iceland	12.50
Ireland	8.54
Italy	9.90
Luxembourg	3.75
Netherlands	13.44
Norway	17.42
Portugal	8.06
Spain	8.44
Sweden	17.61
UK	12.16
Total	10.43

Table 6.20 provides some details of the beliefs of Deaf people about the extent of sign language in institutions. In terms of the existence of a law, only in Finland were most Deaf people convinced there *was* a law about sign language. This is consistent with the real existence of the law, since 1995, and the positive steps to publicise it, which the Deaf association has undertaken. Beliefs about sign language used in a bilingual approach in school in each country, seem to be rather optimistic, with over 80% of Deaf people in Austria, Greece, Norway and Sweden believing there was a bilingual school. The true incidence of bilingual schools is likely to be less than implied by these claims.

Only in Sweden was there the belief that there existed a sign language research centre at University. All of the respondents believed this. This might be partly explained by the concentration of the sample in the Stockholm area. Seventy-five percent of Germans and Norwegians knew of a research centre on sign language. In most other countries the percentage of people, who knew of a centre, was rather low.

In terms of television programmes for Deaf people with signing, the majority believed that there were such programmes in their countries. Notable exceptions were Spain, Austria and Greece (with only 4%, even though we know that there is legislation to provide television for Deaf people). Apart from these countries, it would seem that there is awareness of the TV programmes for Deaf people in most countries.

Full time interpreters were thought to be available by everyone, only in Sweden and Denmark. Very few people in Austria, Belgium, Greece, Italy and Portugal thought that there were full-time interpreters. The question had asked about part-time and about

full-time interpreters. The implication was that full-time interpreters were "professional" and earned their living in that way.

Only in Denmark did all the respondents think that there was a sign language dictionary. Almost 40% of the UK sample were not aware of the BSL dictionary which had been produced after 20 years of work, by the national Deaf Association.

Table 6.20 Existence of certain sign features (Q38 – Deaf interviews) (minimum=0; maximum=1) Higher means Deaf people thought they had it in their country

- 1= Law about sign language
- 2= School using a bilingual approach
- 3= Research centre for sign at University
- 4= TV programme for Deaf people which uses sign
- 5= Full time interpreters
- 6= Sign dictionary

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6
Austria	0	87	60	20	7	13
Belgium	4	60	36	44	20	84
Denmark	9	73	9	100	100	100
Finland	73	42	42	67	83	75
France	23	58	32	49	44	39
Germany	9	63	75	81	81	75
Greece	8	83	0	4	22	35
Iceland	13	13	50	75	75	75
Ireland	8	23	0	92	92	31
Italy	10	56	22	67	20	78
Luxembourg	0	0	0	50	0	13
Netherlands	25	75	25	50	69	81
Norway	17	83	75	100	92	92
Portugal	0	44	19	63	19	81
Spain	21	24	15	24	59	59
Sweden	28	88	100	100	100	89
UK	9	68	45	94	87	61
Total	15	58	37	60	58	63

### Aspirations for the future

We asked people about their thoughts for the future of sign language and we can compare these directly to the beliefs about the present in the variable "extent of language use". The comparison is shown in Table 6.21. We can see that there is a gradual increase in the expectations for sign language over the next thirty years. There is a slight anomaly in returns from countries which already had a great deal of the provision of sign language (ie Sweden) where the aspirations seem to be less. This has occurred because data returns indicated that interviewees chose not to respond, since they considered that they had already sign language in these settings. There are also anomalous results in Germany and in Italy (where the sampling had been problematic as

mentioned earlier). These anomalies implied that there would be less signing in ten years time than there is now.

Overall, we can conclude that Deaf people see these areas as growth areas for sign language and that they expect there to be progress over the next thirty years.

This point can be further expanded in terms of the type of signing which is to be expected. This question (Q43) was asked in terms of the people and roles (as already described in Table 6.18.).

Table 6.21 Aspirations for sign language extent  
(% who believe it exists or will exist)

Country	Extent now	Extent in ten years	Extent in 30 years
Austria	33	71	96
Belgium	43	51	64
Denmark	70	61	77
Finland	62	56	71
France	37	62	67
Germany	60	52	56
Greece	30	62	73
Iceland	60	52	56
Ireland	41	72	80
Italy	47	39	50
Luxembourg	18	43	55
Netherlands	64	86	91
Norway	83	15	18
Portugal	38	68	77
Spain	40	60	71
Sweden	84	7	7
UK	58	60	72
Total	50	56	65

The purpose of this question (Q43) was to discover the beliefs about sign language and the appropriateness of the variety of signing. Sign language would be used naturally by all leaders of most minority group and people may have aspirations that others should be able to sign back to them. It is reasonable for minority group members to expect that they can be understood in education and that those professionals who deal with them should be able to hold conversations with them in their own language. The situation for Deaf people differs only in that they are seldom an immigrant group and they have no homeland with a separate cultural infrastructure. The question about who should sign, and in which form, is of some importance (Table 6.22).

Because of the nature of sign it has been possible for people to speak while they are using signs – although this cannot be termed sign language as the spoken language grammar tends to dominate the utterances. Nevertheless, Deaf people see hearing signers using this form of communication and will also attempt it, themselves. We

believe it is indicative of the strength of belief in their own language as to how Deaf people use this and how they view others who try.

In almost all cases, the majority of Deaf people want hearing people to sign like Deaf people – that is, to use sign *language*. Government officials, Members of Parliament and doctors are less likely to be expected to sign like Deaf, but even there, Deaf people suggest that in future it would be possible for them to do so.

Table 6.22 What kind of signing in future (% who believe it should be like this)

	Sign like Deaf	Sign with speech	A few signs	No sign
Members of Parliament	42	30	16	13
Government Officials	42	29	16	13
Head Teachers in Deaf school	73	22	2	1
Teachers of Deaf	78	20	1	1
Doctors	49	33	13	6
Health Professionals	52	32	11	4
TV Presenters - hearing	53	27	10	10
TV Presenters - Deaf	90	8	0	1
Social Workers	71	21	5	3
Priest	63	24	7	6
Deaf in Good Jobs	83	15	1	1
Deaf in ordinary jobs	84	13	3	0
Deaf at Deaf club	93	6		
Hearing parents of Deaf	73	25	2	1
Hearing Director of Deaf organisation	64	28	4	4
Deaf Director of Organisation	90	9	1	
Full-time interpreters	86	13	1	

One of the important aspects of sign use that we must recognise, is how Deaf people view their own leaders. It is a common finding in emerging minority groups, that it is vitally important that the leaders of the community are seen to use the community language. This turns out to be also the expectation of Deaf people. The largest majorities are for all items referring to Deaf people as TV presenters, directors of Deaf organisations and Deaf people in good or ordinary jobs. This must be seen as an important finding from the point of view of the advancement of the Deaf community. Whether the Deaf leaders are able to deliver sign language in all public engagements remains to be seen.

### Knowledge of sign language

We set a short *quiz* on sign language and gave this to all those who were contacted. The results are informative (Table 6.23). The statements offered were either true or false (if people guessed, they would be able to have half the items correct - so the chance score for 12 items was 6). The statements (Q47) included: signing was invented in America, learning to sign damages your speech, sign language is the same

as gestures. As was the case in terms of the extent of provision, Sweden comes out in front of the others, with Finland, Norway, Ireland following. The least accurate returns were from Luxembourg, Iceland, France and Greece. Deaf people in the former countries seem to know more about sign language.

These findings are entirely consistent with the extent of sign language use in each country. In Table 6.24, we present the correlations of the main variables of the extent of use and the measure of knowledge of sign language as presented in the test. All the correlations are highly significant statistically, which means that there is a direct relation between the extent of use of signing in the country and the knowledge of sign by Deaf people. The negative values in the table mean that high scores in one variable are associated with low scores in the other. This arises from the way the calculations were made.

Table 6.23: What do you know about signing  
(maximum 12; chance score 6)

Country	Test score
Austria	9.00
Belgium	7.76
Denmark	8.45
Finland	10.18
France	6.81
Germany	8.30
Greece	7.05
Iceland	6.00
Ireland	10.15
Italy	7.10
Luxembourg	6.14
Netherlands	7.69
Norway	10.17
Portugal	8.56
Spain	8.73
Sweden	10.61
UK	8.42
Total	8.30

Table 6.24 Correlation measures of sign use and sign knowledge

	<i>Extent</i>	<i>Sign Use</i>	<i>Sign users</i>
Sign Use	-0.67		
Sign users	-0.83	0.78	
Test	0.52	-0.65	-0.72

As a final indicator of signing use and knowledge, we offered two pictures to the interviewees. In each case we provided 3 glosses, which we considered to be more or less closely associated with the natural sign language order. The task is similar to measures used in the Gallaudet surveys of Deaf education and signing. The purpose is to determine if people are more likely to attach the typical sign language sequence to the pictures or more influenced by the spoken language. The task is tricky because each

spoken language has a different structure and so the final result has to be interpreted with care.

In the event, the task proved to be inconclusive, with Deaf people unlikely to choose consistently, any one of the options. This is in itself, an interesting finding, as it appears that the order of signs in respective sign language may not be fixed in this context. One can also argue that the task delivered by different researchers in different countries is just too variable. However, there is little within-country consistency in perceived sign-order. Deaf people seem to choose a range of different ways of signing the same picture. It seems that this is likely to place sign language, as different in a number of ways, from the fixed order of spoken languages. Sign languages require much further research on all aspects.

Table 6.25 How is the picture signed by you and by other Deaf? (%)

	SOV	SVO	OSV	Don't know
Picture 1 - self	32	37	23	8
Picture 1 – other Deaf	28	25	19	28

S=subject; O=object; V=verb

Table 6.26 How to sign the second picture? (%)

	SOVV	OSV	VOSV	Don't know
Picture 2 - self	47	31	12	10
Picture 2 – other Deaf	32	26	10	32

## Conclusions

This chapter has examined some (not all) of the data collected by interviewing Deaf people in 17 countries of Europe. The task in itself was a major one in the time allocated and the results are of considerable interest. As they represent a snapshot of the beliefs and ideas about sign language in 1997, it is hard to determine how they will fit into the changing scene of provision across Europe. What does seem to be the case is that where sign language is used more extensively, the Deaf people are more knowledgeable. Aspirations are generally high for the use and recognition of sign language.

Most of the Deaf community members who were interviewed, had attended Deaf Schools, with a majority in residential schools; more respondents from Italy were integrated (40%). People started school earlier in Belgium, in the Netherlands and in the UK.

Relatively few had sign language consistently at school. The majorities in Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK said teachers never signed to them. In contrast, respondents signed to other Deaf children. This led to a situation where Deaf children were experiencing sign relatively early (prior to 10 years old) but mostly from other Deaf children. However, exceptions were in Greece, the Netherlands and Portugal, where over 40% said they learned sign language after the age of 11 years. The impact of such late learning of a community language must be very great. One result that we might expect, is the creation of *linguistic insecurity*, in that people would not be

confident of their signing skills and, it is true that they tended to believe they had difficulty with signers from other areas of the same country.

In terms of language use, Deaf people showed a marked dualism with signing used primarily with partners at home and with other Deaf people, but very rarely in any circumstance outside of the home. Strikingly most people (other than Deaf people) used spoken language (even when they were considered friends). It is also significant that only just over one third of hearing children of Deaf people were likely to use sign language with their Deaf parents.

In terms of status, it is clear that there is low objective status for sign languages as they are used relatively little in a range of places and by a range of people. Even professionals in the field of Deafness were not likely to use sign language. Both the knowledge of, and the real existence of laws, on sign language, research centres, TV programmes, interpreters, and dictionaries varied enormously from country to country; the traditional north-south divide appeared to apply with Nordic countries, better provided for and Southern Europe, less well off. Aspirations for improvements in this situation were relatively high, though possibly optimistic, given current circumstances. Some care has to be taken with samples in Italy where the full quota could not be achieved and in Sweden and Denmark, where more Deaf professionals were respondents.

It is hard to detect any major recent change in sign language status. It seems on the whole that sign language use is confined to home situations and meetings with Deaf friends. When hearing people are involved, the situation is dominated by spoken language.

## Organisations and Institutions

In this chapter, we examine the responses to the postal questionnaire for people (mostly hearing) who work in specified institutions concerned with Deafness. A full list of intended interviewees was provided to each partner but some organisations or institutions did not exist in some countries. Details on these were provided in Chapter 5.

The fact that the response rate varied meant that some individual countries produced relatively few returns and the statistical analysis of these, while reported here, may not be completely reliable because of the small numbers. This applies to Austria, Ireland, Luxembourg and Sweden.

It is difficult to judge what the range of institutions dealing with Deaf people might be in each Member State. It is likely to include schools for the Deaf and Deaf Associations, but the range of other services varies from region to region. It is likely that the survey carried out by the EUD directly with Deaf Associations (to be published in parallel with this report) will highlight which agencies exist in principle, in which countries. What this study does, is to examine people's knowledge of the institutions and the organisation's attitudes to Deaf people.

### Signing

The first question in this section asked about the description of Deaf people's signing. Although it has become appropriate to term what Deaf people use for communication, as sign *language*, it is not clear that this form is always used by all the professionals. Although there are grounds for optimism that the EU rulings on the recognition of sign language has led to increased knowledge it is not yet evident that this has penetrated even to the organisations which have a role in Deafness.

Table 7.1 indicates the extent of understanding of the term sign language. This can be compared with Deaf people's response (see Chapter 9).

Table 7.1: How do Deaf people communicate in your country (a) and what you call it (b) - % who say sign language

Country	(a) Deaf use SL	(b) I call it SL
Austria	100	86
Belgium	88	80
Denmark	100	100
Finland	86	86
France	67	75
Germany	64	71
Greece	74	65
Iceland	100	100
Ireland	80	80
Italy	53	53
Luxembourg	No data	No data
Netherlands	79	57
Norway	82	64
Portugal	100	100
Spain	76	81
Sweden	100	100
UK	79	71
Total	80	77

It would appear that the term, sign language, is in use quite extensively and is the usual means of referring to Deaf people's communication. However, the actual word used varies a good deal and may or may not incorporate the word "language" (Table 7.2).

Table 7.2 Terms used to refer to Deaf people's signing (responses given by respondents from organisations)

Austria	OGS
Belgium	Vlaams Gebarentaal; LSBF
Denmark	Tegnsprog
Finland	Finnish Sign Language; Viittomakieli
France	Langue des Signes Francaise
Germany	DGS
Greece	GSL
Iceland	Icelandic Sign Language
Ireland	ISL
Italy	Lingua dei Segni Italiana; LIS
Luxembourg	
Netherlands	Nederlandse Gebarentaal; NGT
Norway	norsk tegnsprak
Portugal	Lingua Gestual Portuguesa
Spain	LLengua de signes Catalana; Lengua de Signos Espanola
Sweden	Svenskt Teckensprak
UK	BSL

By and large, these correspond to the labels which Deaf people have used. Respondents were asked if they had been involved in supporting actions for sign language – putting their signatures to petitions, writing articles or organising courses etc. The results indicate that 43% had taken part in more than one activity supporting sign language, but the next largest response was that 34% had not been involved at all, in any action in support of sign language. The most common of the remaining activities was the signing of a petition but overt action such as demonstrating or sending a letter were very rarely undertaken. It would seem that there has been very little direct action in support of sign language.

Respondents were asked about their views on the status of sign language in their country. The results (Table 7.3) seem rather optimistic in many cases (eg Portugal and the UK) and rather pessimistic in countries where there is some legislation (eg Finland). Overall, there seems to be a considerable number who believe that sign language has status equal to other languages – 29%, though the largest group suggest that there is no recognition (47%).

Table 7.3 Estimates of the status of sign language %

Country	Equal to other languages	Less than majority - equal to minorities	Less than spoken languages/ not recognised
Austria	0	14	86
Belgium	33	17	46
Denmark	17	67	17
Finland	7	7	86
France	27	9	64
Germany	14	7	71
Greece	35	30	35
Iceland	9	9	82
Ireland	30	20	50
Italy	28	11	61
Luxembourg	0	0	100
Netherlands	38	15	46
Norway	9	64	27
Portugal	83	17	0
Spain	31	14	46
Sweden	14	86	0
UK	60	20	20
Total	29	22	47

The likelihood is that each country is at a different stage of development in relation to the actions needed to recognise sign language and in regard to the work needed to advance the situation of Deaf people.

## Signing at Work

In this section, the intention was to discover the extent of sign language use. Since all of the organisations had an involvement in Deafness to some extent, there was an expectation that their chosen form of communication would be of relevance.

Taking all together, 24% said that there was a policy of *signing all the time* at work. This seems a very high figure given the diverse institutions involved and it does seem likely that this question proved problematic in translation. Twenty-two percent had no special policy at work. Nineteen percent had signing but only through an interpreter and 24% had signing and speaking most of the time. Nineteen percent had no Deaf people working there. Individual country data did not show systematic patterns.

There were some differences according to where the respondent worked. Those who worked with children or young adults were more likely to have a policy involving signing and speaking than the others (35% as compared to 20%) and they were more likely to have a policy for communication.

## The People at the Centre or in the Organisation

We tried to obtain a measure of how people signed in the organisation and question 26 and 27 were designed to give an indication of the signing which was produced by hearing and by Deaf people. The request for a percentage proved to be too awkward for a significant number and there were frequent sets of entries which did not add up to 100. The data is not useable and we cannot tell reliably, whether the Deaf and hearing people are mostly likely to speak and sign at the same time or whether sign language is used.

Many centres had courses (every week or often) to learn sign language (40%) although one in eight thought courses were unnecessary because there were no Deaf workers. There was no special pattern for the responses according to the type of centre or the Deaf people it served.

Within the centres, contact with Deaf people was frequent. In the organisations which dealt with children and young people, the respondents claimed contact every day (81%) of which the major part was continuous (56%) and even those who dealt mainly with adults where continuous contact was less (30%), the regular contact was high (63-68%). In organisations that dealt with adults, 10% of the respondents had very little contact with Deaf people.

Another contact with sign language is through the use of interpreters. The profession in Europe is still in its infancy but there are opportunities to use interpreters. Although the responses did not indicate continuous use, there was a large group who said they used interpreters often as part of their work (29%) and more who used them sometimes (27%). A minority (29%) rarely or never used them.

Table 7.4 Use of sign language interpreters (%)

	everyday	often	sometimes	rarely	never
Austria	17	17	17	17	33
Belgium	5	24	43	14	14
Denmark	9	36	27	9	18
Finland	18	18	9	27	27
France	20	40	30	10	0
Germany	0	14	50	14	7
Greece	6	59	6	12	18
Iceland	11	22	11	22	33
Ireland	0	11	44	33	11
Italy	38	0	13	25	13
Luxembourg	0	0	0	0	0
Netherlands	0	38	46	8	8
Norway	27	36	9	18	9
Portugal	0	50	30	10	10
Spain	6	9	40	17	14
Sweden	38	38	13	0	13
UK	13	60	7	7	13
Total	10	29	27	15	14

There are differences in the pattern of use for different countries. Seventy-six percent of Swedish respondents claimed to use interpreters often or everyday. In the UK, the figure was 73%, while Norwegian, Greek and French respondents returned figures which were in the 60's. Those who used interpreters least were in Ireland, Italy, Austria, Iceland and Spain – in each case, over 30% rarely or never used interpreters.

We asked about where interpreters could be obtained and what the individuals knew about this (Table 7.5).

Table 7.5: How does your centre obtain interpreters  
(% of people who marked this – these do not sum to 100%)

	Staff interpreter	Staff help out	agency	Outside interpreters	Don't know details
Austria	33	33	0	33	33
Belgium	33	29	58	33	4
Denmark	9	9	91	0	0
Finland	27	18	55	27	0
France	33	44	33	22	0
Germany	15	46	62	38	8
Greece	36	32	27	27	9
Iceland	40	10	50	0	10
Ireland	33	0	33	44	11
Italy	53	6	6	35	12
Luxembourg	0	100	0	0	0
Netherlands	14	21	79	14	14
Norway	30	20	80	20	10
Portugal	64	9	0	36	0
Spain	24	21	31	41	10
Sweden	29	0	86	0	0
UK	23	15	62	69	0
Total	31	22	45	30	7

Again there are noticeable differences between countries. Those most likely to have a staff interpreter seem to be Portugal and Italy. But the biggest differences are in the existence of agencies for the booking of interpreters. These are most likely to be mentioned in Denmark (91%), Sweden (86%), Norway (80%) and the Netherlands (79%). Agency provision seems less developed in Austria, Luxembourg, Portugal, Greece, Spain and Ireland. Direct booking of interpreters did not seem to happen in Denmark, Sweden, and Iceland, although it was prevalent in the UK (69%).

Following from these questions about the existence of sign at work, we provided a series of 7 statements to try to elicit a judgement of *commitment to sign at work* (question 32, Appendix 1, organisations). These statements, which the respondent had to indicate as true or false or not applicable, included "signing is an essential part of our work," and "signing is not accurate enough for our work." From the responses it was possible to produce a *commitment* score.

The results are consistent with the previous country distinctions. Swedish responses suggest greater acceptance and use of sign language in the workplace. Least positive are France, Germany, Luxembourg, Spain, Italy and Austria.

Table 7.6 Commitment to sign language at the Centre(min= 0,max= 7)

Austria	3.86
Belgium	4.04
Denmark	4.55
Finland	4.71
France	2.75
Germany	2.93
Greece	4.19
Iceland	4.45
Ireland	4.70
Italy	3.67
Luxembourg	0.50
Netherlands	3.57
Norway	4.82
Portugal	4.83
Spain	3.64
Sweden	5.71
UK	5.20
Overall average	4.08

## The Status of Sign Language

In this section, the project looked at attitudes and practices in sign language.

Table 7.7 Estimating the population of Deaf people

	Estimate	"Real"
Austria	13750	4000
Belgium	9126	5027
Denmark	3864	2590
Finland	6577	2515
France	26875	28447
Germany	40000	40538
Greece	8100	5128
Iceland	400	132
Ireland	3944	1763
Italy	28227	28526
Luxembourg	400	198
Netherlands	18727	7620
Norway	4000	2150
Portugal	12857	4931
Spain	22991	19436
Sweden	13750	4318
UK	31071	28234

The first question concerned numbers of signers in each country. It was hoped that this would centre on a mean value for each country. This proved to be justified, as the figures produced when the means are calculated from the categories (see question 33,

Appendix 1, Organisations), the figures are very close to what might be expected. From an analysis of medical, epidemiological and educational records in the UK, our prediction is that 1 in 1500 of the population are ex-Deaf education (Deaf school or mainstream) and that Deaf community members are about 1 in 2500. The most realistic estimate of sign users based on these figures and a more detailed examination of the UK hearing population, is that 1 in 2000 of the population are Deaf and are sign users. We have used this proportion to calculate the "real" figures for each country (Table 7.7). That is we have used the most recent census figures on each country, to be divided by 2000, to give the expected Deaf population. Because there are some variations from country to country in hearing loss and school placement practices, the "Deaf community" figures are expected to contain a measure of error. There are also some differences in the numbers of people who call themselves Deaf. That is to say, the figures are to be treated with caution; however, it should be clear that the likelihood is that the true in-country population is close to that estimated by the above method.

The estimates made by the respondents are highly correlated with these population figures as a whole ( $r=0.95$ , which is highly statistically significant).

It would seem that this group have consistent estimates but that in most cases they are more than what would be predicted by general population statistics.

One of the components of the status of sign language is the extent to which it is used in different circumstances. We asked people about the use of sign in Deaf school, at home, in Deaf clubs and so on (Q34). This was combined to make a measure of sign use (Table 7.8). This might indicate the extent of use of sign in that country according to these respondents. It can also be compared to estimates of the other groups (See Chapter 9).

Table 7.8 The extent of sign language use in Deaf situations (Q34)  
(minimum=8; maximum=40) Lower means more use of sign

Country	Sign Use
Austria	16.14
Belgium	15.71
Denmark	13.58
Finland	14.64
France	18.58
Germany	16.57
Greece	15.00
Iceland	16.09
Ireland	14.40
Italy	19.17
Luxembourg	18.50
Netherlands	17.07
Norway	14.27
Portugal	15.83
Spain	17.54
Sweden	12.38
UK	16.21
Overall average	16.16

The figures tend to be consistent, as before. Swedish respondents produce the figures which imply the greatest penetration of sign in Deaf situations. They are followed by Denmark, Norway, Ireland and Finland.

A further measure of how far sign language has penetrated in the community is to determine the numbers of people who are known to use sign language and who have a public or professional profile. We asked about the politicians, teachers, television presenters, Deaf people who used sign. It was then possible to combine the figures to provide a measure of the frequency of people who use sign.

In this calculation, Finland leads, with Sweden following closely and the UK and Denmark, the next countries. The countries with least sign users according to these respondents, are Luxembourg, Italy, Ireland and Spain.

Table 7.9 Rating of the numbers of people who are sign language users (minimum=17; maximum=85) Lower means more use of sign

Country	Sign users
Austria	50.50
Belgium	52.58
Denmark	49.50
Finland	42.79
France	54.00
Germany	51.62
Greece	56.06
Iceland	53.18
Ireland	57.70
Italy	58.13
Luxembourg	64.00
Netherlands	50.25
Norway	54.50
Portugal	56.82
Spain	57.00
Sweden	44.88
UK	46.67
Overall average	53.06

In Table 7.10, we use responses to questions about the extent of sign language in public life. This draws on Question 36 in Appendix 1 (Organisations). People were asked if there was a law about sign language, a school which used signing, a TV programme for Deaf people, videotapes in sign language, training programmes in sign and so on.

The results follow the emerging pattern, although in this case, the UK is ahead of Denmark and Sweden by a small amount. Norway follows. The lowest extent of sign use is in Luxembourg, Greece, Ireland and Italy.

In Table 7.11, we look at some of the features in more detail. It might be felt that there should be clarity in the mind of those who work with Deaf people as to whether there is a law about sign language. If this were true, then the figures would be either 100 or zero. However, there is a good deal of difference of opinion. Sweden is most definite that there is a law (75%) and Germany, Luxembourg and Portugal are definite that there is no law. The others are between these, with the majority on the side of there not being a law.

*The EU Resolution in 1988 has not translated itself into law in Member States.*

Most claimed that there was a bilingual school (sign and speech) in their country, although in Sweden where there has been a bilingual model school for some time, people were less certain than in other countries.

Table 7.10 Extent of sign language use in a range of institutions (Q36 – organisations) (minimum=0; maximum=21)  
Higher means more use of sign

Country	Extent
Austria	12.83
Belgium	11.16
Denmark	17.17
Finland	16.14
France	12.25
Germany	14.36
Greece	9.58
Iceland	13.09
Ireland	10.90
Italy	10.76
Luxembourg	5.00
Netherlands	11.86
Norway	16.36
Portugal	12.42
Spain	11.38
Sweden	17.00
UK	17.29
Total	12.85

All the Austrian respondents believed there was a research centre on signing at a University and none of those from Luxembourg believed this. Spain, Italy and Denmark did not believe that they had a research centre either.

All of those from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden believed there was a television programme for Deaf people which used sign language as did the vast majority in the UK, Ireland and Germany. Spain, Greece, Portugal and Iceland were least likely to believe they had a TV programme.

Full-time interpreters are available in Denmark, Finland, Germany, Sweden and the UK according to everyone. Interpreters are less likely in Belgium, France, Italy and Greece.

There were claims that sign dictionaries existed in Denmark, Finland, Luxembourg, the UK, Iceland and Greece. Less well known was the existence of a dictionary in Austria and Sweden.

Taken as a whole these give a great deal of insight into the thinking of people in relation to signing in their country.

Table 7.11 Existence of certain sign features (Q36 – organisations)  
(minimum=0; maximum=100) Higher means people thought they had it in their country

1= Law about sign language

2= School using a bilingual approach

3= Research centre for sign at University

4= TV programme for Deaf people which uses sign

5= Full time interpreters

6= Sign dictionary

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6
Austria	33	100	100	50	83	67
Belgium	12	79	44	52	48	92
Denmark	58	91	17	100	100	100
Finland	57	86	57	100	100	100
France	50	92	33	75	67	83
Germany	0	86	79	86	100	93
Greece	5	95	26	21	74	100
Iceland	9	36	82	27	91	100
Ireland	10	50	40	90	90	80
Italy	6	71	24	41	59	82
Luxembourg	0	0	0	50	0	100
Netherlands	7	86	64	7	93	86
Norway	50	90	70	100	91	91
Portugal	0	75	64	36	92	92
Spain	16	84	8	19	70	84
Sweden	75	75	88	100	100	63
UK	43	86	86	93	100	100
Overall	23	80	46	55	80	89

## Where signing is used

One of the questions asked, concerned locations in which signing might be used and by whom.

Table 7.12 Where signing is used (% who agreed this – does not sum to 100)

	By Deaf	By hearing	By interpreters	Not used
Job Interviews	52.15	9.09	42.58	8.61
Hospital or clinic	39.90	8.37	72.41	15.76
Doctor	37.37	7.07	67.68	20.20
Government or Parliament	13.07	3.01	37.69	56.78
Study at college	44.72	13.06	66.33	16.08
In shops	23.73	8.47	19.21	61.58
Services – job finding, counselling	51.76	24.62	59.30	11.56
TV News	34.13	11.54	46.15	25.00
TV Programmes	38.54	10.94	36.46	40.10
In schools	71.43	46.80	32.02	10.84

The results are informative. In most language minorities, we would expect the language to be used in a range of circumstances which represent daily life. So there would be language evident in the media, in shops, in schools and even in the community medical services. However, this is not the case in terms of sign language. It is almost completely *service oriented* – it is presented in a delivery mode for people who need access to majority services. As a result, there are no Deaf shops, clinics or governmental offices. The Deaf community is a very different sort of community and the sign language which is present is mainly through sign language interpreters, who are, almost without exception, hearing people. The balance of relations and of power in transactions which involve sign language, is very skewed. Although we can expect country differences in terms of extent of services, we do not predict a difference in the overall pattern.

This type of finding is further amplified in Table 7.13 where we examine predictions for the future and how hearing and Deaf people should sign.

One might expect there to be aspirations that people in power, authority or in contact would acquire fluency in the language in which they have to deal with Deaf people. We might also predict that as sign language emerges, Deaf leaders would be expected to associate themselves more and more with the language. This tends to happen.

Table 7.13 What kind of signing in future (% who believe it should be like this)

	Sign like Deaf	Sign with speech	A few signs	No sign or use interpreter
Members of Parliament	17	24	17	40
Government Officials	17	26	17	38
Head Teachers in Deaf school	61	28	6	4
Teachers of Deaf	70	23	3	2
Doctors	22	27	24	27
Health Professionals	24	28	24	23
TV Presenters - hearing	30	21	16	31
TV Presenters - Deaf	73	15	3	8
Social Workers	49	29	13	7
Priest	46	30	15	8
Deaf in Good Jobs	70	23	4	2
Deaf in ordinary jobs	74	20	4	1
Deaf at Deaf club	87	9	1	1
Hearing parents of Deaf	66	30	2	1
Hearing Director of Deaf organisation	72	22	3	2
Deaf Director of Organisation	81	15	1	2
Full-time interpreters	79	16	1	3

Expectations for hearing people are generally low in terms of their acquiring sign language like a Deaf person. There are two exceptions - those hearing people who are directors of Deaf organisations (a common situation) and those who are interpreters.

Otherwise, service roles other than teaching do not seem to carry a need to sign "like Deaf people."

One interesting role is that of priest. In the past, it has been the clergy who have had a mission to Deaf people and it has been often the case that the priest was one of the few people who could communicate effectively with Deaf people. The finding here is that the expectation has been reduced and the priest is not expected to sign like Deaf people.

In contrast, Deaf people are expected to use sign language. These respondents make a distinction, which Deaf people themselves, do not make, between those who are in good jobs, those who are in ordinary jobs and those who are at the Deaf club. The figures for Deaf use of sign language increase in that order – the Deaf club is the place where sign language is likely to be used to its fullest extent.

### Knowledge of sign language

As a final measure, we set a test of sign knowledge. This was also set for Deaf people. The results deviate a little from what had been the pattern in terms of service. The professionals involved in these returns appear to know more about sign language than service development in each country tends to imply. UK, Finland, Denmark and Italy have the highest scores with lowest scores in Greece and Luxembourg.

Table 7.14 Knowledge of Sign Language (test max = 12, min=0)

Austria	10.50
Belgium	9.26
Denmark	10.83
Finland	10.92
France	9.45
Germany	9.92
Greece	7.74
Iceland	10.00
Ireland	10.70
Italy	10.82
Luxembourg	8.50
Netherlands	10.21
Norway	7.30
Portugal	9.58
Spain	9.66
Sweden	10.00
UK	10.93
Overall average	9.75

As a final indicator, the measures of sign extent, use and knowledge were correlated (Table 7.15). These indicate the relationships between the variables which have been measured in the study. The correlation turns out to be weak (not significant) and may need further investigation, to explain why.

Table 7.15 Correlation of measures of sign use, extent and knowledge

	<i>test</i>	<i>Sign Users</i>
Sign Users	-0.16	
Extent	-0.18	-0.15

In this chapter, the responses of those people in organisations or institutions dealing with Deafness have been analysed and indicate some of the same features as the interviews with Deaf people.

In the next chapter we will examine a broader range of community responses.

## Individuals

### People with varying degrees of involvement with Deaf people

A third group who were targeted were those people who might be more likely to represent the general public and who would have varying degrees of involvement with Deaf people. As has been seen in Chapter 5, they cannot be said to be a representative sample of the population as a whole, since they tend to be from the upper socio-economic classes and include more people who have an interest in Deafness than had been planned. Nevertheless, they are a step removed from the Deaf people themselves and from the respondents from organisations that have a service role for Deafness. They provide a different perspective. They are also quite a diverse group and a second analysis is provided following the general analysis of questionnaire returns. This second analysis separates the population into those who have regular contact with Deaf people - once a week or more - and those who sometimes or never come into contact with Deaf People.

A final point is that the responses from a number of countries fell below 50% of the number contracted - Denmark, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg, Spain and Sweden. None of the data for these countries can be treated as completely reliable. In the case of Denmark and Luxembourg, the number of returns was less than 10 and these are not reported in the tables which follow. Their data is used in the grouped analysis in the second part of the chapter.

### Further Characteristics of the Group

A first question concerned links to Deafness.

Table 8.1 Participants and link to Deafness

	Work in centre with a lot of contact with Deaf %	Number
Austria	44	26
Belgium	46	48
Finland	42	31
France	16	25
Germany	47	16
Greece	36	46
Iceland	27	24
Ireland	32	22
Italy	69	14
Netherlands	25	28
Norway	27	15
Portugal	30	29
Spain	43	62
Sweden	63	17
UK	40	37

From Table 8.1, we can see that the returns from Sweden and Italy are rather anomalous in their inclusion of large proportions who have an involvement with Deafness in their work centre. This is combined with the fact that less than 50% of the requested returns were achieved. This means that their sample is rather different from the other countries. This was not the intention in this part of the study. For the first analysis, we will work with this total sample, but in the final part of the chapter, we will attempt to separate out those more and less involved with Deaf people. Those who worked in centres which had involvement with Deaf people were mostly full-time workers (78%).

It can also be seen that there are more returns overall from Spain, Belgium and Greece. This is because a number of research partners were involved in each country and their targets were set up to match one another in order that further comparative analysis could be done later.

## Signing

As with the other groups, the questions dealt with how signing was perceived. The answers to this section and to all later sections are affected by the fact that a large number of people had limited contact with Deafness, and tended not to respond to certain questions. As a result the percentages quoted are usually less than in previous analyses ie they are affected by *no responses*.

Table 8.2: How do Deaf people communicate in your country (a) and what you call it (b) - % who say sign language

Country	(a) Deaf use SL	(b) I call it SL
Austria	58	62
Belgium	57	26
Finland	67	69
France	38	30
Germany	69	63
Greece	55	40
Iceland	0	0
Ireland	55	45
Italy	29	54
Netherlands	46	21
Norway	87	67
Portugal	92	76
Spain	56	58
Sweden	100	100
UK	57	61
Total	58	51

Although there is an overall majority who favour the term sign language and a majority who believe that is what Deaf people do, there are quite large deviations from this. As was pointed out in a previous chapter, there is some difficulty because the terms for sign language do not translate very well and the distinctions which are made in one country,

may not apply elsewhere. However, it does seem as if the terms for sign language are more established in Sweden. In Germany, Finland, Norway and Portugal, there is a larger majority for the terminology of sign language.

The precise terminology that is used is very similar to that produced by Deaf people and by those in organisations. However, the percentage who do not know the names or who give idiosyncratic names, is greater (19%).

Overall 30% believed sign language was recognised in their country and 32% thought it was not recognised, with 24% not knowing either way. The figures are generally low, indicating lack of recognition and limited awareness of sign language.

Table 8.3 Is signing recognised as language

Country	Sign is recognised
Austria	27
Belgium	13
Finland	48
France	29
Germany	20
Greece	11
Iceland	33
Ireland	23
Italy	46
Netherlands	30
Norway	60
Portugal	30
Spain	22
Sweden	100
UK	31
Total	30

Very few people had been involved in a single positive action in favour of sign language eg less than 2% had written a letter. Nineteen percent claimed to have been involved in more than one activity such as signing a petition, but the majority, 59%, have not been involved at all.

When asked about the status of the language, the majority in most countries believed that sign language was not recognised or was placed below other spoken languages. Sweden, Portugal and Italy were exceptions.

Table 8.4 Estimates of the status of sign language %

Country	Equal to other languages	Less than majority - equal to minorities	Less than spoken languages/ not recognised
Austria	4	20	76
Belgium	28	11	62
Finland	0	45	55
France	38	13	50
Germany	38	25	38
Greece	26	17	57
Iceland	4	0	96
Ireland	14	18	68
Italy	43	36	21
Netherlands	26	22	48
Norway	29	36	36
Portugal	71	18	11
Spain	8	10	79
Sweden	50	44	6
UK	11	20	69
Total	24	20	56

### Sign Language at Work

Since many of the respondents were not involved in Deaf work some of these questions did not apply completely and so only a summary of salient points is presented here.

Fifty-seven percent said that they had no Deaf people in their workplace. Seventeen percent had Deaf people but only as visitors. However, there were 28% who said there were Deaf people at their workplace. In terms of communication, 61% had no Deaf people working there and 8% said they had no policy for communication. The remainder (31%) had varying policies with the largest group involved in signing and speaking.

When asked about actual contact with Deaf people, 30% had contact each day but 63% had no contact or very little. This carried over into experiences of sign language interpreters who, in theory, are more likely to be visible in public situations. However, unless, people worked in a centre where there were Deaf people, they were very unlikely to have experienced interpreters at all (Table 8.5). Awareness of sign language through experience seems to be limited.

Table 8.5 Experience of sign language interpreters %

	See/use interpreters	See sometimes outside work
Work at centre with a lot of contact with Deaf	56	42
Centre with little contact	2	98

## Sign Language Use

There was a range of questions which related to experiences of sign language. We asked when they had first seen signing.

Table 8.6 First experience of sign language in relation to the work now

	<10 years	11-25 years	25 years +	Never seen
Work at centre with a lot of contact with Deaf	25	50	24	0
Centre with little contact	23	39	34	3

There were no major differences between the two groups according to where they worked now in terms of when they had first seen sign. Very few had never seen sign.

Table 8.7 Age at which signing was first seen %

Country	<10 years	11-25 years	25 years +	Never seen
Austria	16	48	36	0
Belgium	19	58	21	0
Finland	23	48	29	0
France	25	33	25	17
Germany	31	63	6	0
Greece	13	33	49	0
Iceland	38	42	21	0
Ireland	36	41	23	0
Italy	29	36	36	0
Netherlands	25	39	36	0
Norway	33	27	40	0
Spain	23	47	31	0
Sweden	40	27	33	0
UK	26	40	34	0
Total	24	44	30	1

Average age of the group clearly affects the age when they had seen sign language. However, since the overall average age was 40 years, Table 8.7 is still informative. The figures for Portugal have not been considered here as the group average age was only 28 years and this would have affected the category 25+ in regard to first signing. There were some differences in the early experience of sign by country, with the respondents from Greece and Norway likely to have seen signing later; those from Sweden were more likely to have seen signing while in elementary school.

We asked for estimates of the number of signing Deaf people in the country (Table 8.8). Not surprisingly, this was much less accurate than for the people who worked in Deaf organisations or for Deaf people themselves. Nevertheless there was still a significant correlation with the “real” figure as already described ( $r=0.73$ ). Italy, France, Germany

and the UK provided very large under-estimates of the population of sign users. This would seem to be an important problem if the members of the public underestimate the size of the Deaf community and thereby, give it less attention.

Where services tend to have been better, there are huge over-estimates – eg Finland, Norway and Sweden. It seems likely that people judge the extent of a community by the publicity it receives and the experience of the services offered. This is a significant finding and one that indicates the benefits of dissemination and public relations.

Table 8.8 Estimating the population of Deaf people

	Estimate	"Real"
Austria	8227	4000
Belgium	6200	5027
Finland	6210	2515
France	18433	28447
Germany	21567	40538
Greece	7819	5128
Iceland	11700	132
Ireland	4214	1763
Italy	4833	28526
Netherlands	11643	7620
Norway	5567	2150
Portugal	2514	4931
Spain	15394	19436
Sweden	11719	4318
UK	19819	28234

## Sign Use

One of the interesting issues is the perception of how much sign language is used. From Question 29 (Appendix 1, individuals) it is possible to produce a composite measure of the sign use in "Deaf" situations - schools, Deaf clubs and so on.

Table 8.9 Composite measure of sign use in different "Deaf" locations (school, television, Deaf clubs) max=40, min=8; lower is more use

	Sign Use
Austria	19.15
Belgium	16.00
Finland	13.48
France	21.57
Germany	16.13
Greece	17.63
Iceland	15.00
Ireland	15.68
Italy	18.21
Netherlands	17.04
Norway	12.73
Portugal	19.75
Spain	17.10
Sweden	13.33
UK	14.17
Overall average	16.61

The estimate of most sign use overall comes from Norway, with Sweden, and Finland following. Least use estimates come from France, Portugal and Austria. These tend to fit the emerging pattern.

A further measure can be obtained from the composite of the estimated extent of sign use by those in professional roles (Question 34, Appendix Individuals). This asks about the numbers of people who are likely to use signing (officials, teachers, doctors, Deaf people and so on).

Table 8.10 Rating of the numbers of people who are sign language users (minimum=17; maximum=85) Lower means more use of sign

	Sign Users
Austria	51.10
Belgium	46.66
Finland	41.70
France	48.82
Germany	46.64
Greece	53.65
Iceland	56.71
Ireland	52.26
Italy	58.62
Netherlands	48.33
Norway	39.43
Portugal	54.25
Spain	51.04
Sweden	40.57
UK	40.44
Grand Total	49.20

In this measure, Norway leads with the UK, Sweden and Finland following. Least extent of sign users is in Italy, Iceland and Portugal.

In the measure of extent of sign language use (Table 8.11) Sweden is again in the lead followed by Finland and Germany. The countries which are thought to have fewest sign related features are Greece, Portugal, Iceland and Austria.

These patterns remain generally consistent with what has already been reported. The detailed measure of 6 of the components of this also indicate the state of development in each country. In regard to the existence of laws about sign language, we find that those in Norway, Finland and Sweden are mostly aware of the legislation while those in Austria, Germany, Ireland, Greece, Iceland, Netherlands and the UK, accurately claim that there is no law.

The majority of people believe that there is a bilingual school in their country – unanimous in Germany, Norway, Sweden and the UK. Fewer people in Iceland believe they have a bilingual school. Otherwise the figures are higher than those for the people who work in organisations for Deaf people, indicating an over-optimistic view by the individuals.

People have heard of the University research centre in Germany and Sweden but they are not aware of any centre in Greece, Ireland and Spain.

Table 8.11 Extent of sign language use in a range of institutions (Q31– individuals) (minimum=0; maximum=21)  
Higher means more use of sign

Country	Extent
Austria	9.52
Belgium	10.22
Finland	14.81
France	10.71
Germany	13.94
Greece	6.07
Iceland	8.00
Ireland	9.68
Italy	11.64
Netherlands	10.25
Norway	12.27
Portugal	9.41
Spain	10.61
Sweden	16.94
UK	13.20
Total	10.64

Table 8.12 Existence of certain sign features (Q31 – Individuals) (minimum=0; maximum=100) Higher means people thought they had it in their country  
1= Law about sign language; 2= School using a bilingual approach  
3= Research centre for sign at University; 4= TV programme for Deaf people which uses sign  
5= Full time interpreters; 6= Sign dictionary

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6
Austria	0	94	82	63	83	73
Belgium	12	92	68	59	76	95
Finland	86	96	63	90	100	100
France	43	88	77	65	84	70
Germany	0	100	100	75	100	100
Greece	4	97	26	24	64	52
Iceland	9	40	92	0	100	100
Ireland	0	77	42	86	93	92
Italy	33	92	60	58	78	100
Netherlands	6	94	88	26	100	95
Norway	80	100	86	100	100	100
Portugal	19	74	53	54	100	90
Spain	25	90	24	15	89	93
Sweden	79	100	100	100	100	100
UK	10	100	92	97	100	100
Overall	26	90	64	56	90	90

People know about a television programme in sign for Deaf people in Finland, UK, Norway and Sweden but not elsewhere. Spain and Greece are very unlikely to be able to mention a programme for Deaf people.

In regard to interpreters, there is a general belief that they exist and only in Greece does there seem to be some doubt in the minds of those who responded.

Most countries are thought to have a sign dictionary (even though the Deaf people disagree) and only in Greece does this seem not to apply.

These findings indicate the range of services and facilities which people believe to exist in Deafness. Their views will be examined further in the next chapter.

Table 8.13 Where signing is used (% who agreed this – does not sum to 100)

	By Deaf	By hearing	By interpreters	Not used
Job Interviews	52	8	65	17
Hospital or clinic	45	12	58	0
Doctor	39	10	52	29
Government or Parliament	12	5	33	61
Study at college	44	9	54	28
In shops	22	8	11	68
Services – job finding, counselling	56	25	57	10
TV News	19	12	50	26
TV Programmes	29	8	40	42
In schools	64	34	33	18

These results show that hearing respondents tend not to expect sign language to be used in any general public areas. Their views confirm that sign language is a language to be used in service situations, mainly by interpreters. There is, at no time, a majority in favour of hearing people using sign language in any of these situations. Interestingly, only in three situations is there a majority in favour of Deaf people using sign – at an interview, in job counselling and in school. Otherwise the weight of responsibility on sign language rests with interpreters.

Taken on its own, this would imply a major need to develop sign language in a range of natural settings. As pointed out in the last chapter, sign language is being seen only as a service language delivered by hearing interpreters and it is not a natural community language.

### Knowledge of sign language

As before, it was possible to estimate the level of knowledge about sign language from the combination of responses to question 31 (Appendix 1, Individuals). The pattern of results is broadly similar to previous measures but some of the rankings change. Sweden is at the top, followed by the UK, then Germany and Italy. The lowest scores are from France and Iceland.

The knowledge scores were also split according to whether the respondent worked in a centre that had a lot of contact with Deaf people. In this case, there was a significant difference between the two groups – contact 10.12 (sd2.22) and no contact 7.72 (sd 2.75). As one might expect, knowledge is better when there is greater contact.

Table 8.14 Sign Language Knowledge  
(maximum= 12, minimum=0)

Austria	8.04
Belgium	8.15
Finland	8.84
France	6.87
Germany	9.73
Greece	8.17
Iceland	7.67
Ireland	9.29
Italy	9.36
Netherlands	8.63
Norway	8.43
Portugal	8.85
Spain	9.00
Sweden	10.87
UK	10.03
Overall average	8.65

As a final indicator, the measures of sign extent, use and knowledge were correlated (Table 8.15). For this group, the correlations are lower in value and, although significant, are less impressive. The test score is related to the extent of sign language services and provision, which the person can name; it is not related to the estimates of sign use and the sign users. The extent of perceived service in sign is related to each of the other variables.

Table 8.15: Correlations of the measures of sign knowledge and sign status measures.

	<i>test</i>	<i>wsl</i>	<i>extent</i>
wsl	-0.19		
extent	0.47	-0.38	
sign user	-0.18	0.33	-0.49

## Analysis of those with little or no contact with Deaf people

In this section of the report, we have separated out those who have had little or no contact with Deaf people. This group was least likely to respond, as they believe that they have little comment to offer. As a result, the in-country figures for returns seldom reached the target of 16. In order to deal with this variable, we have grouped the responses according to the pattern of response, which has occurred throughout the study so far. Countries were grouped according to the extent of services available and the previously discovered responses from Deaf people. Inevitably there is some overlap and the final determinant was to produce comparable numbers in each sample. The results of this grouping are shown in Table 8.16.

Table 8.16: North South divide and contact with Deaf people - numbers of people

	Extensive contact with Deaf	Contact sometimes or never
Northern Countries: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK	114	85
Southern Countries: Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain	161	78

However, in terms of the distinguishing features of the group, there were some significant differences (Table 8.17).

Table 8.17: Upper Socio-economic Groups (% employed in professional or office jobs)

	Extensive contact with Deaf	Contact sometimes or never
Northern Countries	61	49
Southern Countries	57	29

This last table indicates the systematic bias in response. Those with the most contact with Deaf people are professionals; or put another way, of those with little or no contact with Deaf people only 25% were professionals, whereas of those who had contact, 46% were professionals. If we try to use these returns, as they are, we would introduce a systematic bias in favour of the group with more contact. They are likely to have received more education and are certainly in higher status jobs in society. Because of this, the remaining analysis was carried out on only professionals or managers, where there were sufficient numbers to allow the comparisons to be meaningful.

Table 8.18: North South divide and contact with Deaf people - numbers of people (professionals and managers only)

	Extensive contact with Deaf	Contact sometimes or never
Northern Countries: Austria, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, UK	64	30
Southern Countries: Belgium, France, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Portugal, Spain	72	22

Table 8.19: Age differences in the sample (years)

	Extensive contact with Deaf	Contact sometimes or never
Northern Countries	42	42
Southern Countries	39	40

Table 8.19 indicates that the age distribution is rather similar in the revised grouping. There are larger differences in gender with fewer of the more-contact groups being male (41% in the North and 33% in the south), while the less-contact groups have 50% males (north) and 62% males in the south. These differences reflect the greater involvement of women in service roles in many countries.

Having identified this group, comparisons can be made. In the first of these, the question concerns the perceived status of sign language in each country (Table 8.20).

Table 8.20: Percentage who rate sign language equal to other languages

	Extensive contact with Deaf	Contact sometimes or never
Northern Countries	23	18
Southern Countries	17	15

This trend seems consistent with what might be predicted. In the composite variables which have been produced (Q29, Q31), there are also differences emerging which are consistent with degree of contact.

Table 8.21: Where is sign language used? (Compare to Table 8.9, Q29)  
Max=40, min =8. Lower score implies more use of sign

	Extensive contact with Deaf	Contact sometimes or never
Northern Countries	14.3	16.6
Southern Countries	16.5	21.6

Table 8.22: What is the extent of sign language use? (Compare to Table 8.11, Q31) Max=21, Higher means more use of sign

	Extensive contact with Deaf	Contact sometimes or never
Northern Countries	15.1	10.5
Southern Countries	11.0	7.5

Table 8.23: Use of sign language by different Deaf and hearing people (Q34) Max=85, Lower means more people use sign

	Extensive contact with Deaf	Contact sometimes or never
Northern Countries	42.6	47.7
Southern Countries	49.8	58.6

Table 8.24: Knowledge of sign language (Compare to Table 8.14, Q37)  
(max=12) Higher means greater knowledge

	Extensive contact with Deaf	Contact sometimes or never
Northern Countries	10.2	8.2
Southern Countries	9.7	7.8

The pattern of results is relatively clear. Taking only the professional and managerial groups, we find that professionals in Northern countries tend to have the scores most in keeping with knowledge and awareness of Deaf people. Those who have little contact, and who live in Southern countries, tend to indicate less knowledge and lack of awareness. There is a consistent trend of this difference between professionals in the north and in the south. The key point that has been discussed throughout tends to be reinforced. In countries where services have been developed most, there is greatest awareness among all those who have been sampled. Even when we choose people from a narrow socio-economic band, the differences are clear.

We were also able to collect attitudinal data for this group, which asked them about their ratings of Deaf people (Q38).

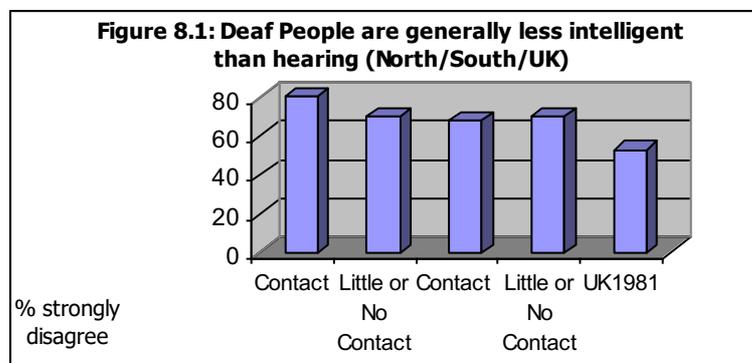
Table 8.25: Attitudes to Deaf people (Max=50, higher means more positive)

	Extensive contact with Deaf	Contact sometimes or never
Northern Countries	37.0	35.0
Southern Countries	33.7	33.0

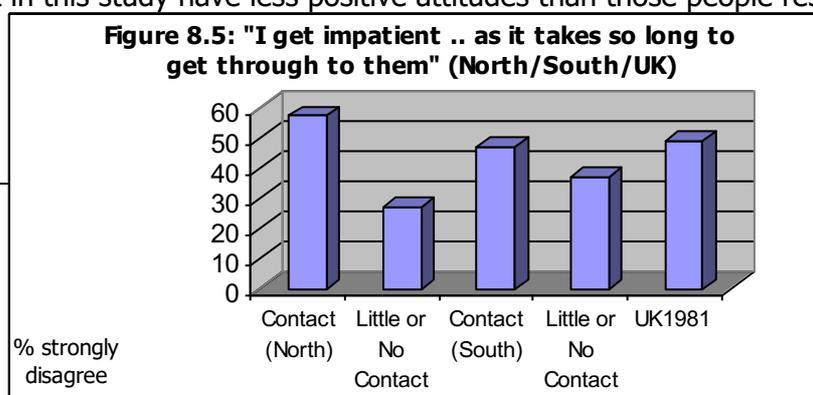
The attitudes expressed about Deaf people are consistent with the trend, which has been seen throughout.

As part of the survey, participants were asked to complete attitude scales about their reactions to Deaf people. These scales were taken from a survey of the UK public in 1981, where 537 people were interviewed (Bunting, 1981). Only a selection of the responses are analysed here in order to contrast the main features of the responses. The UK 1981 sample was drawn from the general population and so one would expect them to be less aware of deaf people's needs than the professionals and managers in this sub-sample of the European population. The results were presented in Figures 8.1 to 8.5. Statements were presented where the participants had to indicate agreement on a scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The statement shown here are negative on deafness and so the reported figures for "strongly disagree" are positive about deafness.

Most of the results indicate that attitudes have not improved markedly since 1981 and that there are still clear differences between North and South and that extent of contact is a strong predictor of positive attitude.



Only in the statement that deaf people are less intelligent is there evidence of a consistent improvement in attitude across the four groups (Figure 8.1). In terms of "Deaf people have more than the usual physical complaints" (Figure 8.2) and "Deaf people behave oddly" (Figure 8.3) the group with little contact are rather similar to, or worse than, the 1981 survey. When faced with the statement that "I find it embarrassing to talk to Deaf people in public" (Figure 8.4) or "I get impatient in dealing with Deaf people as it takes so long to get through to them" (Figure 8.5), those with little contact in this study have less positive attitudes than those people responding in 1981.



It is quite obvious that we cannot make definitive statements in comparing a national study with an international one and the time gap between 1981 and 1997 may not be as significant as one would hope. Nevertheless, the comparison offers some interesting points for discussion. It would appear that professional response is consistently better than the response in the past, while there is only limited advance in those who have less contact. While Deaf people may be more prominent to the services, there is not yet evidence of a positive social awareness of deafness.

### *In conclusion*

These results give us a firm basis for understanding the views of hearing people in relation to sign language status.

There seems to be a strong relation between the existence of services and the awareness of Deaf people. Although one can consider that Deaf people exist and are seen even when there are no services, it seems that the path to recognition and more positive attitude is through service development. This appears to have some pitfalls in that it creates a service orientation among hearing people.

The differences, which have been highlighted so far in terms of the north-south divide in Europe, are apparent throughout. In the final part of the analysis, we were able to control the variable of employment level of the respondents. Even when this was done there were consistent differences in greater awareness and more knowledge, in northern countries.

The results indicate the need to develop services but also to be aware of the way this influences hearing people's thinking.

## Making Comparisons

### Deaf people, Institutions and Individuals

The purpose of the Sign on Europe study was to report on data collected from a range of people with a varying involvement in the field of Deafness. It was designed to provide support to the efforts of the National Committees and to give strength to their claims for the recognition of sign language.

On the one hand, it was an opportunity to contact and interview Deaf people directly about their feelings and ideas. This was the first time this had been done on a European scale since 1987, when Jones and Pullen met with 10 Deaf people in cities and rural environments in the 12 Member States of the EU. Their report highlighted the considerable North-South divide, where the Northern countries had considerably more resources and services than did the Southern Mediterranean States. It would seem that, on the surface, the same circumstances still apply. The Nordic countries appear to have considerably more resources, have better informed professionals and a more aware general population.

On the other hand, the study also had to make comparisons. One of the interesting aspects of the study of the status of sign language, was the comparison of the aspirations of Deaf people with the expressed views of hearing people, as indicated by their responses to the same questions. In this chapter, we try to bring together some of the findings and make the judgements of how well Deaf people's views have been taken on by the hearing people.

In Chapter 5, the characteristics of the three groups which have been studied were set out. Inevitably, in a study carried out in a very short space of time, in 17 countries and by different researchers, has meant some differences in the sampling. When we consider also that questionnaires had to be collected by post and that respondents were volunteers, then it is not surprising that response rates varied. This produced some diversity in the samples within each country and it has not yet been possible to smooth out all of the problems which have arisen from this. Up to this point we have tried to use all the data available to us. This has meant some distortion in the numbers with for example, Spain and Belgium over-represented and Germany under-represented. It may be possible at a later date, to revisit the data with a view to reducing the sample in order to produce more equitable groupings. However, it is in the nature of social research that general findings are needed quickly to inform the policy makers.

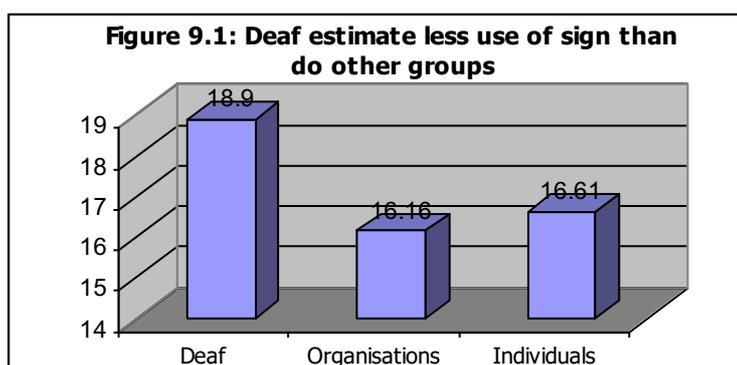
The comparisons set out in this final chapter suffer from many of the difficulties of the diverse sample and the data should be interpreted with care. Even so, there are interesting points to be made and key issues are apparent. These points will be of value to all in the field of Deafness.

## Language in Use

One of the key issues is *when* and *where* the language is used. We asked all three groups (Deaf people, respondents from institutions and organisations, and individuals) for their estimates of whether sign was used often, sometimes, rarely, in Deaf schools, on television, at home and so on. We prepared a composite score. A low score indicates more use of signing.

Table 9.1 Estimates of sign use in different situations (lower scores indicate more sign use)

Country	Deaf	Organisation	Individuals
Austria	19.38	16.14	19.15
Belgium	17.72	15.71	16.00
Denmark	16.64	13.58	13.00
Finland	18.75	14.64	13.48
France	22.53	18.58	21.57
Germany	18.69	16.57	16.13
Greece	18.96	15.00	17.63
Iceland	17.63	16.09	15.00
Ireland	15.00	14.40	15.68
Italy	21.50	19.17	18.21
Luxembourg	24.75	18.50	22.00
Netherlands	19.44	17.07	17.04
Norway	17.42	14.27	12.73
Portugal	20.00	15.83	19.75
Spain	20.68	17.54	17.10
Sweden	13.56	12.38	13.33
UK	16.81	16.21	14.17
Total	18.90	16.16	16.61

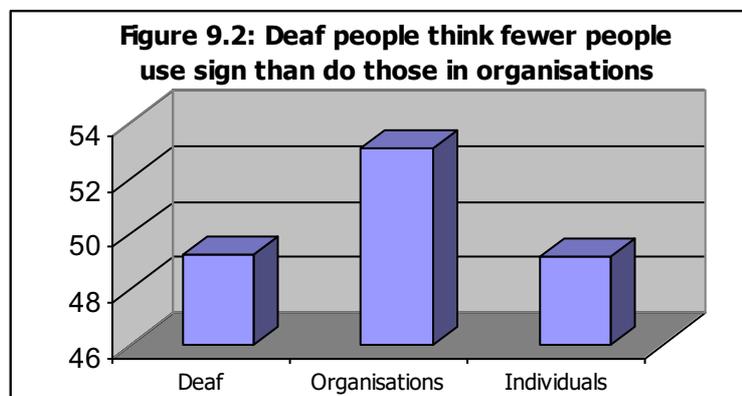


What is significant is that Deaf people's estimate of how much signing is used in the range of settings is always less than that of hearing people. The responses from organisations which includes Deaf respondents, is always an over-estimate of the extent of use of sign language in comparison to Deaf people. We can look for many different explanations of this but the most likely is that the Deaf person's view is based on real experience and tends to include the problems which communication entails. The hearing view is more idealistic.

One of the measures used was the estimate of the numbers of certain groups of people within the country who are thought to be sign users. These include officials in government, teachers, doctors and so on. In this respect (Table 9.2) Deaf people tend to estimate slightly less people are sign users than do those who are in organisations and about the same overall as individuals.

Table 9.2 Rating of the numbers of people who are sign language users (minimum=17; maximum=85) Lower means more use of sign

Country	Deaf	Organisations	Individuals
Austria	54.21	50.50	51.10
Belgium	52.96	52.58	46.66
Denmark	39.00	49.50	51.00
Finland	44.27	42.79	41.70
France	53.62	54.00	48.82
Germany	45.71	51.62	46.64
Greece	54.75	56.06	53.65
Iceland	58.50	53.18	56.71
Ireland	51.00	57.70	52.26
Italy	51.44	58.13	58.62
Luxembourg	64.17	64.00	65.50
Netherlands	50.75	50.25	48.33
Norway	44.75	54.50	39.43
Portugal	53.63	56.82	54.25
Spain	50.36	57.00	51.04
Sweden	35.82	44.88	40.57
UK	43.66	46.67	40.44
Total	49.24	53.06	49.20

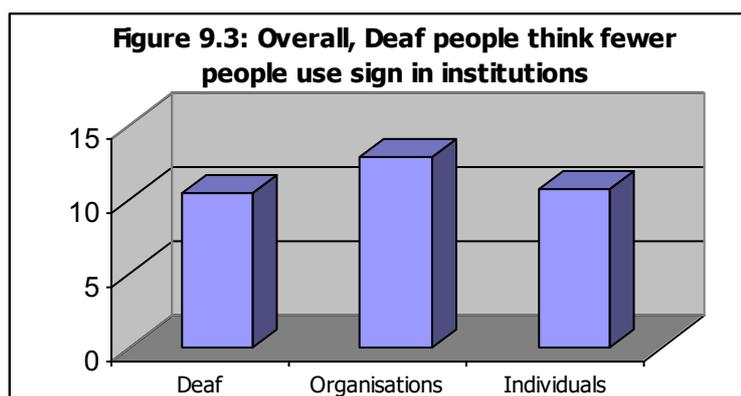


Here we find that the Deaf people and the individuals provide the same average overall but there are differences in terms of different countries. The variation in the sampling within countries makes fine-grained analysis difficult, but we can see that Deaf people in Sweden and Denmark seem to believe that there are many more sign using people than do the workers in organisations and the hearing individuals. In Belgium, France and Norway, the opposite seems to be the case. We can take this a little further with the

comparison of the situation in each country where we can ask about the laws and provision. In this case a dualism occurs. Wherever there is greater provision in fact, as in the Nordic countries (Denmark, Sweden), the Deaf people rate the extent of provision and recognition of sign language more highly than do hearing people; where the level of provision is lower, such as in the Southern countries of Europe (France, Portugal, Spain, Italy), the hearing people tend to believe that provision for sign language is much more extensive.

Table 9.3 Extent of sign language use in a range of institutions (minimum=0; maximum=21) Higher means more use of sign

Country	Deaf	Organisations	Individuals
Austria	7.00	12.83	9.52
Belgium	9.00	11.16	10.22
Denmark	14.73	17.17	10.71
Finland	12.92	16.14	14.81
France	7.79	12.25	10.71
Germany	12.50	14.36	13.94
Greece	6.25	9.58	6.07
Iceland	12.50	13.09	8.00
Ireland	8.54	10.90	9.68
Italy	9.90	10.76	11.64
Luxembourg	3.75	5.00	4.20
Netherlands	13.44	11.86	10.25
Norway	17.42	16.36	12.27
Portugal	8.06	12.42	9.41
Spain	8.44	11.38	10.61
Sweden	17.61	17.00	16.94
UK	12.16	17.29	13.20
Total	10.43	12.85	10.64



If we look in more detail at some of the components, we find that in Finland both Deaf and hearing believe there is a law about sign language. However, the organisations and individuals in Norway and Sweden believe there is a law of which the Deaf people appear not to have heard. In France, also, the hearing respondents and organisations seem to be over-optimistic about the law on sign language.

Another potential marker of community awareness is whether Deaf programmes on the media are known to hearing people. When we compare the responses to the question of whether there is a programme on television for Deaf people using sign, there is a variety of responses. In Sweden, Denmark, UK, Germany and Ireland, there is agreement that there exists a programme like this. This would be consistent with the programme showing at a time when hearing people might become aware of it or where it is embedded in programmes for hearing people. In other countries, there is no programme and then there is a tendency for the non-Deaf groups to believe a programme exists when it does not (Greece, Austria).

Table 9.4 Is there a law about sign language in your country? (% who say yes)

Country	Deaf	Organisations	Individuals
Austria	0	33	0
Belgium	4	12	12
Denmark	9	58	67
Finland	73	57	86
France	23	50	43
Germany	9	0	0
Greece	8	5	4
Iceland	13	9	9
Ireland	8	10	0
Italy	10	6	33
Luxembourg	0	0	0
Netherlands	25	7	6
Norway	17	50	80
Portugal	0	0	19
Spain	21	16	25
Sweden	28	75	79
UK	9	43	10
Total	15	23	26

Strikingly, in France the organisations and the individuals appear to be convinced that there is a programme which the Deaf people do not know about. Elsewhere there seem to be programmes which the Deaf know about but the hearing do not – in the Netherlands, Portugal, Iceland and Italy. These country variations are interesting in themselves and cannot be explained from the data which we have. It seems likely that knowledge about television depends on the way it is presented, whether it is cable television or other closed or subscription means. However, it is likely to be a major source of information for hearing people about sign language.

Table 9.5 Is there a television programme for Deaf people which uses sign language (% who say yes)

Country	Deaf	Organisations	Individuals
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Austria	20	50	63
Belgium	44	52	59
Denmark	100	100	86
Finland	67	100	90
France	49	75	65
Germany	81	86	75
Greece	4	21	24
Iceland	75	27	0
Ireland	92	90	86
Italy	67	41	58
Luxembourg	50	50	17
Netherlands	50	7	26
Norway	100	100	100
Portugal	63	36	54
Spain	24	19	15
Sweden	100	100	100
UK	94	93	97
Total	60	55	56

One of the first things which hearing people request in relation to a language is a dictionary and so it is interesting to check how consistent is the knowledge of the existence of a sign dictionary. Perhaps predictably, Deaf people are much less likely to know about the existence of a sign dictionary (or hearing people and organisations are more likely to believe one exists when it is not there). In either case, there is a discrepancy in belief about sign language. In some countries there is awareness of the existence of the dictionary (eg Denmark, the Netherlands and Norway). In other cases, there is a discrepancy. Although there is an award winning British Sign Language dictionary in circulation, 40% of the Deaf respondents did not know about it.

In Luxembourg, the hearing people and organisations believe there is a dictionary of which Deaf people are unaware. This is true in Ireland, Austria and France. The opposite tends not to be the case – Deaf people having a dictionary but the hearing people being unaware of it. This might seem logical as the prime users of a dictionary are likely to be hearing people (at least in the current service orientation of Deafness) but this need not be the case and it is hardly likely in any other minority language situation. It would be the members of the minority who might have more need of the majority language in a dictionary than the other way around.

Table 9.6 Is there a sign language dictionary? (% who say yes)

Country	Deaf	Organisations	Individuals
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Austria	13	67	73
Belgium	84	92	95
Denmark	100	100	100
Finland	75	100	100
France	39	83	70
Germany	75	93	100
Greece	35	100	52
Iceland	75	100	100
Ireland	31	80	92
Italy	78	82	100
Luxembourg	13	100	100
Netherlands	81	86	95
Norway	92	91	100
Portugal	81	92	90
Spain	59	84	93
Sweden	89	63	100
UK	61	100	100
Total	63	89	90

Table 9.7 Aspirations of Deaf People and those in organisations  
What kind of signing in future? (% who believe it should be like this)

	Present		Future	
	Deaf	Organisations	Deaf	Organisations
	Sign like Deaf	Sign like Deaf	No sign or use interpreter	No sign or use interpreter
Members of Parliament	42	17	13	40
Government Officials	42	17	13	38
Head Teachers in Deaf school	73	61	1	4
Teachers of Deaf	78	70	1	2
Doctors	49	22	6	27
Health Professionals	52	24	4	23
TV Presenters - hearing	53	30	10	31
TV Presenters - Deaf	90	73	1	8
Social Workers	71	49	3	7
Priest	63	46	6	8
Deaf in Good Jobs	83	70	1	2
Deaf in ordinary jobs	84	74	0	1
Deaf at Deaf club	93	87		1
Hearing parents of Deaf	73	66	1	1
Hearing Director of Deaf organisation	64	72	4	2
Deaf Director of Organisation	90	81		2
Full-time interpreters	86	79		3

### Where is sign language used?

We asked questions about where sign language was used. This was couched in terms of the present but also in terms of what was hoped for in the future. This aspiration is significant as it might indicate how Deaf people see the targets for the next generation.

It is perhaps not surprising to find that Deaf people wish to see much more signing than do the hearing or people in organisations. We did not feel it was appropriate to analyse the views of people who did not have experience of signing, in this question, so the comparison is between the Deaf and those people in organisations (a small number of whom were Deaf). The results indicate that there is a difference in perspective. Deaf people feel that more hearing people should sign like Deaf people, while the organisation members are content to see signing used by interpreters.

This is generally consistent with an emerging view that hearing people and organisations see sign language as a service provision and not as a community language. To reach a balance, the aspirations of Deaf people would need to change or there would need to be a great deal more publicity of their case and/or information made available about sign language.

### What do people know about sign language?

We set up a short test on sign language knowledge and each of the groups completed the measure. It may seem odd if we were considering any other minority group, to discover that outsiders know more about the language and the community than do the community members. This is frequently the case in the field of Deafness. Most of the research is carried out by hearing people and is presented in written form in journals and books. Seldom is there feedback to the Deaf community which that community can use. There has been very little Deaf originated research and none of this has had a major impact in European language terms. There are Deaf researchers and there are increasing numbers of Deaf people who have been trained in research and in the disciplines such as psychology and linguistics; however, the overall impact has been limited so far.

When we examine the test scores, Deaf people are lower than the two other groups overall. Deaf people have lower scores on knowledge about sign language than people in organisations except for the case of Norway and Sweden. Even where the individuals have a significant proportion of people who have limited experience of Deafness, the Deaf groups are still likely to have lower scores.

### Knowledge and Change

Hearing people have access to written information. They are more likely to use written information. They are more likely to generate questions which are answerable by written communication. The means of data collection, data storage and dissemination are all culturally appropriate for hearing people. Not surprisingly, it is hard for Deaf people to break into the cycle of information generation, never mind achieve access to already created knowledge.

Table 9.8: What do you know about signing (max 12; chance score 6)

Country	Deaf	Organisations	Individuals
Austria	9.00	10.50	8.04
Belgium	7.76	9.26	8.15
Denmark	8.45	10.83	8.33
Finland	10.18	10.92	8.84
France	6.81	9.45	6.87
Germany	8.30	9.92	9.73
Greece	7.05	7.74	8.17
Iceland	6.00	10.00	7.67
Ireland	10.15	10.70	9.29
Italy	7.10	10.82	9.36
Luxembourg	6.14	8.50	5.17
Netherlands	7.69	10.21	8.63
Norway	10.17	7.30	8.43
Portugal	8.56	9.58	8.85
Spain	8.73	9.66	9.00
Sweden	10.61	10.00	10.87
UK	8.42	10.93	10.03
Total	8.30	9.75	8.65



An alternative view might be to say that a test of knowledge about sign language is misguided or premature, as Deaf people do not view their language and priorities in this way. This is also true. Yet the important issue in European change has to be the creation of knowledge which can be used to inform those in decision-making roles. This information is vital to the Deaf community. Where there is service infrastructure and provision, knowledge of Deaf people is better. Where the position of Deaf people is better, their responses to all aspects of this survey are more positive. The prominence of the Nordic countries in relation to most of the measures used here is significant. The relation between provision, acceptance, knowledge and community development is inevitable. It is likely to be an upward spiral. Deaf people in many parts of Europe have not entered this relationship and the gap between the perceptions of hearing people and their own aspirations is great.

## In Conclusion

Even though this work has come a long way and has investigated more people in more countries than any previous work, it has to be an interim summary. There remains to be completed, a further analysis of a rich and complex data set. The differences within country are just as significant as differences among countries and this report has provided only an initial snapshot. The main points for review are provided in the summary at the beginning of the report and so are not repeated here. The data has to be used to support questions as much as it has to be analysed cold. It is expected that this report will generate questions that can be answered within the study and which will lead to more positive action by the EUD and by the National Committees.

It is to be emphasised that the views of Deaf people continue to be different from those of hearing people. When considering their own lives, language and culture, there is an obvious danger that decisions taken by the majority do not coincide with the perceptions and needs of the minority. This study has been an initial attempt to set the record straight. If it leads to greater awareness and more extended dialogue it will have served a major purpose for a more effective Europe.

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## Appendices

1. Questionnaires
  - 1a Interview for Deaf People
  - 1b Questions for Organisations
  - 1c Questions for Individuals
  - 1d Examples of the translations of the questionnaires
2. List of Research Partners in each country