



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

News Release

Issued: Friday 15 May 2015

UNDER STRICT EMBARGO UNTIL 00.01 BST MONDAY, 18 MAY

Sign language glossary helps deaf pupils engage with science

A vocabulary of sign language which is to revolutionise how science is taught to deaf children has reached a milestone today with its thousandth sign.

The sign language for ‘fireball’ is the thousandth term to be added to a website compiled by experts for use by teachers, interpreters and pupils.

The glossary is available at <http://www.ssc.education.ed.ac.uk/BSL/list.html> and has been developed to meet demand from deaf pupils and teachers for a wider scientific vocabulary in British Sign Language.

The resource means that a simple words such as ‘fireball’ can be communicated with a single sign rather than spelling it out letter by letter.

Users can access on-line video clips of the terms and definitions in sign which will help pupils studying astronomy, biology, chemistry, physics maths and soon Geography.

Complex terms – such as ‘asteroid’, ‘black hole’ or ‘density’ – are explained by on-screen tutors who employ simple definitions that aid understanding.

The vocabulary has been developed by a team of Deaf scientists, teachers and sign linguists at the University of Edinburgh’s Scottish Sensory Centre.

The project, which began in 2007 is supported by the Scottish Government, Scottish Qualification Authority, Heriot-Watt University, The University of Strathclyde and is sponsored among others by the Royal Academy of Engineering, Geological Society of London, Institute of Mathematics and its Application as well as the Edinburgh and London Mathematical Societies.

British Sign Language is a visual-gestural-spatial language used by around 156,000 people in the United Kingdom. Thousands of deaf pupils in Scotland could benefit from the project.

Dr Audrey Cameron, of the University of Edinburgh’s School of Education, said: “The launch of the thousandth term today is a milestone of how far we have come. The resource is

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a breakthrough that will help boost the performance of deaf pupils studying science, and give them the opportunity to fully enjoy the learning process.”

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