

## H.M. the Queen of Sweden inaugurates new Web tool for the deaf

*The Swedish Queen inaugurates Spread the Sign, an international web based translation tool for sign language on the 31<sup>st</sup> of March. The tool increases the accessibility to other sign languages and simplifies the exchange between sign language users in the world.*

Spread the Sign was initiated in 2005 by Social Science teacher Thomas Lydell-Olsen from the Swedish National Upper Secondary School for the Deaf and Hearing Impaired in Örebro.

- Sign language is not a universal language which is the common belief and it has been difficult for deaf students to go abroad and study. From this, the idea of Spread the Sign started and today I am happy that the translation tool can help my students and other deaf people in Europe to understand each other better.

The translation tool is available on the website, [www.spreadthesign.com](http://www.spreadthesign.com). The site is free to use and works so that the visitor enters a word in a selected language, which is then translated visually into the chosen language. Today, there are about 20 000 characters from 11 countries posted.

Jan Björklund, Minister for Education, hosted the opening ceremony at the Foreign Ministry in Sweden.

- Even if sign language has a strong position in Sweden, it varies among the different Member States and we have a long way to go before it enjoys official status throughout Europe. The launch of Spread the Sign confirms Sweden's position as a pioneer when it comes to sign language, and I hope that we will continue to set a good example and inspire other countries to conduct more research into sign language and give deaf and hearing-impaired people a better chance of learning other languages.

Spread the Sign is now continuing its efforts to document sign language in Europe and in the rest of the world. The interest to join Spread the Sign is increasing and recently Japan and Russia joined.

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### Participants at the opening ceremony:

- HM the Queen of Sweden
- Jan Björklund, Minister for Education, Ministry of Education and Research
- Lena Adelsohn Liljeroth, Minister for Culture, Ministry of Culture
- Ute Haller-Block, Deputy Head of Vocational Education and Training Policy, European Commission
- Ulf Melin, Director General for the International Program Office
- Per Thullberg, Director General for The Swedish National Agency for Education
- Greger Bååth, Director General for The National Agency for Special Needs Education and Schools
- Ambassadors from Spain, Britain, The Czech Republic, Turkey, Lithuania, France, Portugal and Germany
- Thomas Lydell-Olsen, the founder and initiator of Spread the Sign