Staying 'In Touch' The Deafblind UK Centre for Education and Research

Dr Peter Simcock



Dr Claire Manford



Rukaiya Sabuwala



Jacky Smith



Staying 'In Touch' The Deafblind UK Centre for Education and Research

Speaker: Dr Peter Simcock,

Associate Professor and Centre Lead

Birmingham City University

A Place of Connection: Being In Touch

- Connecting Researchers, Practitioners and People Living with Deafblindness
- Raising Awareness and Increasing Knowledge
- A Growing Team

Establishing Connection: Getting in Touch

- Centre Launch Event
- Centre Website

Increasing Knowledge

- Growing up and Being Deafblind: Analysing comparative case studies from the Global South and North
- Wellbeing in Wales, is it for All?
- Deaf and Deafblind Sign Language Users' Experience of 'Cash for Care Schemes'
- Navigating Touch In Deafblind Practice

Raising Awareness & Staying In Touch

- Publications & Conferences
- Masterclasses
- Webinars
- Parliamentary Roundtables
- Deafblind People, LAs, NHS Trusts, Schools
- Deafblind Studies

Navigating touch in deafblind practice: From complexity to professional guidance

Speaker: Dr Claire Manford,
Research Assistant
Birmingham City University

Controversies of touch in professional context

- Historical abuse scandals
- #MeToo
- ‘No touch’ policies
- Ofsted Inspector, dismissed for brushing rainwater off a child’s head
- British reservation

Why professionals need to use touch

- 92% teachers view touch positively (Owen & Gillentine, 2011): 30% use it due to fear of accusations (Owen & Gillentine, 2011)
- Provides profound physical, mental, and social benefits (Crucianelli, 2020)
- Is essential to human connection (Banissy, 2023)
- Pivotal for interaction (Gallace & Girondini, 2022).

For deafblind individuals:

- Touch is the most important sense; it is crucial for learning, communication, mobility and orientation, security, and relationships (Wolsey, 2017)
- Touch extends to full-body tactile experiences (Emadi, 2022)
- Essential for meaningful engagement (Watharow and Wayland, 2022)
- Possible with compromise (Mann, 2008)

Enhancing Research Culture Awards

Internal grant funded by BCU

1. Host two in-person focus groups: one for social workers, one for teachers.
2. Use Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) to analyse the data.
3. Disseminate findings at a world café for both focus group participants.
4. Enact Experience Based Co-Design (EBCD) methodology to produce guidelines on the use of touch for practitioners.

Results from Focus Groups

Overlapping Views

- Trust, safety, and strong relationships = the foundation of effective touch-based communication.
- Touch is highly individual.
- Consistency and time essential for building communication and understanding.

Social Workers

- Important to match support workers appropriately.
- Concerns about lacking awareness of sensory impairments, consent processes, and accessible communication.
- They advocated for better training, advocacy, person-centred practice, and clearer guidance on the safe and professional use of touch.

Specialist Teachers (QTMSI)

- Safeguarding Policies and Professional Boundaries in Practice
- Individualized Approaches to Intensive Interaction and Tactile Learning
- Modelling good practice to upskill the workforce

Next steps

- Reflective Thematic Analysis (October 2026)
- World Café Event (November 2026)
- Seek endorsement of the guidelines from relevant bodies
- Dissemination
- Academic article

Any questions: claire.manford@bcu.ac.uk

Deafblindness and it's psychosocial impact: lived experiences, human rights and social work and social care response

Jacky Smith
PhD Scholar
Birmingham City University

My professional journey

- Started supporting people who are congenitally deafblind in a social care service in 1995
- MSc Deafblind Communication, Groningen, Netherlands 2015. Master's thesis focused on ways of finding out what young adults with complex communication support needs want when they leave school
- Interested in how human rights, person centred support and outcome based social care are achieved for people who are congenitally deafblind and have complex communication support needs.

My PhD research

- Researching PhD on supporting active participation for people who are congenitally deafblind in their social care support
- Focusing on people who are congenitally deafblind and have complex communication support needs
- Exploring how we understand the active participation of people who are congenitally deafblind in their own social care.
- What tools and approaches support active participation in this context?
- What impact does targeted staff training and support have on choice making?

Research Title:
Deafblind Services Since 1928: Interpreting the Past to Inform the Future

Speaker: Rukaiya Sabuwala,
PhD scholar,
Birmingham City University

How My Journey Started

- The gap in my own knowledge
- Right to education?
- Deafblindness as a unique condition

My Professional Journey

- My academic background

- Diploma in Educational Leadership
  at Perkins School for the Blind in the United States

- Perkins India as a Consultant

My PhD Research

- Doctoral research at **Birmingham City University**
- My research : **“Deafblindness services since 1928: Interpreting the Past to Inform the Future.”**
- Whose voices were heard, whose experiences influenced services, and whether there were voices that were missed

What Am I Looking At?

- Health and social care, communication and accessibility
- Based in the UK with International influence
- Approaches have developed over time and what we can learn from that history

For more information see our website:

https://www.bcu.ac.uk/deafblind-uk-centre-for-education-and-research

To ask further questions email:

Peter: peter.simcock@bcu.ac.uk

Claire: claire.manford@bcu.ac.uk

Jacky: jacqueline.smith@mail.bcu.ac.uk

Rukaiya: rukaiyasaifuddin.sabuwala@mail.bcu.ac.uk

To keep in touch with the centre please email to request to be added to our mailing list:

claire.manford@bcu.ac.uk

The experience of growing up & being deafblind: Analyzing comparative case studies from the Global South and North, to illuminate barriers to, and enablers of, the achievement of the UN Sustainable Development Goals

- Free in person event
- Lunch and refreshments
- Speakers include Professor Walter Wittich, Dr Peter Simcock, Dr Leda Kamenopoulou
- BSL interpreters
- Book your place using the QR code or : https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/knowledge-translation-event-tickets-1990849996933?aff=oddtdtcreator



Knowledge Translation Event

29th October 2026
9.00am-4.30pm

The STEAMhouse, Birmingham