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Press Release

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## **THRASS SYNTHETIC PHONICS PROGRAMME SET TO MAKE EVEN BIGGER IMPACT IN 2009**

Although we're only a few days into the New Year, the highly successful THRASS synthetic phonics programme is already set to make an even bigger impact on the world of education in 2009, starting with the high-profile launch of the new groundbreaking THRASS Phoneme Machine software with Cued Speech option on 15 January.

The THRASS Phoneme Machine Version 6.0 will be launched by the Rt Hon Malcolm Bruce MP, Chair of the International Development Committee and Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Deafness, at the BETT Show (the world's largest educational technology show) at London Olympia on Thursday, 15 January. The Phoneme Machine is already accredited by SMART Technologies and the launch, which will include a brief demonstration by staff and students from the Exeter Royal Academy for the Deaf, will take place at 10.30am on the SMART Technologies main presentation stage (stand B50). Senior national and international representatives from the world of educational technology and deaf education, including SMART Technologies, RGS Europe, Cued Speech Association UK, Deafax and the National Cued Speech Association (USA) are expected to attend.

The THRASS (Teaching Handwriting Reading And Spelling Skills) synthetic phonics programme, pioneered by British Educational Psychologist Alan Davies, is widely accepted as having the potential to more than double the normal rate of progress for reading and spelling in English. The latest version of the THRASS Phoneme Machine has been developed in response to a request from the Cued Speech Association UK to include a Cued Speech option by THRASS UK as part of its Corporate Social Responsibility Programme. The Phoneme Machine uses human lips to pronounce the sounds (phonemes) in hundreds of frequently used English words and in the Cued Speech option, which can be turned on and off, the shapes, positions and

movements of the hands are displayed alongside the moving human lips, with the cueing for each of the 500 basewords of English demonstrated in a video box.

The considerable significance of the addition of a Cued Speech option is recognized by Anne Worsfold, Executive Director, Cued Speech Association: "The Phoneme Machine is a formidable piece of software. The understanding of sound-based English has been identified as a key element in learning to read and research shows that children with weak phonological skills (dyslectic and deaf children) learn to read with difficulty. The Phoneme Machine will give, for the first time ever, a multi-sensory classroom-based resource which teachers can use to teach phonics to deaf children and which children can also use individually. I expect it to transform the way that deaf children learn to read."

The Phoneme Machine software is an excellent resource for teachers, assistants and parents and it is used in many thousands of schools in the UK and elsewhere, especially Africa, to teach the basics of English and to introduce children to European languages, such as French, German, Spanish and Polish, and/or African languages, such as Zulu, Afrikaans, Setswana and Xhosa (Nelson Mandela's home language), using interactive and printable calendar charts. It is also widely used in the training of student teachers in colleges and universities. It is suitable for learners of all ages and abilities and has been found to be particularly helpful for use with children starting to read, children finding reading difficult and those for whom English is not their first language.

The launch of Phoneme Machine Version 6.0 by Malcolm Bruce in his capacity as Chair of the International Development Committee is also of particular significance, as deafness is a massive problem on the African continent and Phoneme Machine 6.0 with Cued Speech option has the potential to make an enormous difference there. It is an indication of the significance of THRASS that in South Africa it is already being sponsored by Absa Bank, a member of the Barclays Group, through the THRASS Absa TalkTogether Project. In addition, the two-day THRASS Accredited Certificate is already a compulsory module for Foundation Phase student teachers at six South African universities. THRASS UK now intends to approach various organisations (including UNICEF, UNESCO and COMIC RELIEF) regarding the training of teachers to teach deaf children to use Cued Speech, in the countries where English is a first or second language and where THRASS is already highly

regarded and widespread, for example South Africa, Namibia, Botswana and Swaziland.

Phoneme Machine Version 6.0 can be downloaded free-of-charge from the THRASS UK website by teachers and parents and it is also being distributed to 800,000 teachers in the UK on a memory stick, as part of the new Memory 4 Teachers ICT initiative, in which THRASS UK is delighted to be a key partner.

The THRASS synthetic phonics programme is certainly set to make an even bigger impact on the world of education in 2009 by making a real difference to the lives of thousands more children of all nationalities and abilities.

### **Notes to Editors**

The THRASS extensive picture-based training website for schools and parents with access to a wide range of resources and support materials, and extensive evidence of the widespread success of THRASS and details of THRASS Professional Development Courses is at [www.thrass.co.uk/teaching.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/teaching.htm)

For a short promotional video of the Phoneme Machine Version 6.0 with Cued Speech option and other key THRASS interactive resources, visit [www.thrass.co.uk/bettshow09.htm](http://www.thrass.co.uk/bettshow09.htm)

For full details of the Memory 4 Teachers Project, visit [www.memory4teachers.co.uk](http://www.memory4teachers.co.uk), where teachers can also register for the free USB memory stick.

For information about Cued Speech and courses run by Cued Speech Association UK, visit [www.cuedspeech.co.uk](http://www.cuedspeech.co.uk)

Requests for interviews should be made to Hilary Davies +44 1829 741413

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