

29 March 2023

Firstly, thank you for the time taken to work with the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) over the past two years while the use of National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) has been considered for New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) interpreters. We also appreciate the time to attend our meeting on Saturday 18 March 2023 to help us understand the risks and implications of the decision we have been asked to make. The Board had a robust discussion about the introduction of a Certificate qualification pathway to test as an NZSL interpreter.

There were several concerns and issues highlighted by your representatives that have also been raised through previous reports and community consultation over the past two years.

The Board has decided to accept the alternative qualification pathway. Having looked at the issue from several angles this decision is based on:

- the Board remains committed to a standardised methodology of ensuring the competency of NZSL interpreters working in New Zealand
- the process will involve recognition of formal qualifications and an assessment of proficiency.

The Board's clear preference was that a sign language qualification would be the only pre-requisite qualification. Reluctantly the Board has accepted the certificate pathway as an alternative, knowing that the risks this presents can be mitigated by the NZSL proficiency assessment being set at a high level and the ability to have guidelines preventing these interpreters from working in certain settings. Furthermore, but not a primary consideration, the government through the Ministry of Business, Employment, and Innovation (MBIE), is funding the NAATI process, and the Board saw limited merit in committing a significant level of funding to the development and establishment of an alternative process.

While the Board has made this decision, we will continue to strongly recommend a sign language interpreting qualification, currently only provided by the Auckland University of Technology (AUT), as the gold standard to ensure quality interpreting for the Deaf community.

Both AUT and the Sign Language Interpreters Association of New Zealand (SLIANZ) both requested additional consultation before a decision was made. The Board considered whether any additional information would be gathered however believe that feedback already received highlights the concerns of the Deaf community and interpreting sector.

The Board will continue to use a range of levers to ensure the quality of NZSL interpreting is not negatively impacted for the Deaf community, such as:

- Setting a high level of NZSL proficiency of people with a generic certificate in interpreting, and people with overseas Sign Language Interpreting qualifications to become eligible for a NAATI test.
- Clear government guidelines on putting forward interpreters for interpreting jobs.
 - This will include a description promoting sign language-qualified interpreters who are NAATI-certified as delivering a higher quality of interpreting work, especially at the Certified Provisional Interpreter (CPI) level.
 - There will be clear information that people with no sign language interpreting qualification and NAATI certifications are not suitable for any interpreting roles.
 - This will aid with preventing interpreters that do not have the appropriate sign language interpreting qualifications and level of experience/standards from working in high-risk settings.
- The Board will request annual reporting on the use of interpreters to monitor the use of interpreters and will report to the Minister for Disability Issues annually, including if the use of interpreters falls below the guidelines.
- The Board will consider a NZSL Interpreter Workforce Strategy that will look at many of the concerns already raised including a complaints and resolution process, supporting professional development framework and the service models for interpreting services.
 - ODI will reach out to the sector to consult on what the strategy should include, who can be involved and a realistic timeframe.
- The Board are aware that the introduction of NAATI certification for NZSL interpreters will start in at least two years' time, not the 1 July 2024 deadline for spoken language interpreters.

We understand that this decision may raise concerns.

We are committed to supporting the NZSL Interpreter workforce and Deaf community to receive quality interpreting services at individual and systems level. We believe this can be achieved through the other work identified by the Office for Disability Issues (ODI) partly described above.

We also remain committed to setting high standards of NZSL interpreting for the Deaf community.

The Board and ODI would appreciate your continued support to monitor the implementation of NAATI standards and contribution to the development of a Workforce Strategy that we are expecting to review in August 2023.

Nga mihi



Rhian Yates
Chair, NZSL Board