

Briefing

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| Date: | 21 December 2023 |
| For: | Hon Penny Simmonds, Minister for Disability Issues |
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New Zealand Sign Language Board Annual Report 2022/23

Purpose

This briefing provides you with a copy of the New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Board Annual Report for 2022/23, for your information.

Executive summary

The NZSL Board is required to report to the Minister for Disability Issues annually on matters relating to NZSL, and otherwise as required [SOC (14) 57 refers].

This Annual Report provides you with an overview of NZSL use in New Zealand and the Deaf community. It also outlines the Board's:

- establishment, purpose, functions and membership, and
- the programmes and projects led or supported by the Board to progress the NZSL Strategy 2018-2023.

The Board is made up of 8 to 10 members and currently has five members. Two of the five current members, one of whom is the Chair, have terms expiring in June 2024, and have indicated they will not seek reappointment. Refer to the appendix for a brief overview of current Board members.

You will receive advice in February on a shortlist of candidates to fill Board vacancies. Following your decisions, Whaikaha will support you to progress a paper to the Appointments and Honours (APH) Cabinet Committee to appoint members to the Board.

In 2024 the Board will be focused on renewing the NZSL Strategy to support the promotion and maintenance of NZSL for the next five years. The Board has gathered information from the wider NZSL community over the past three years to help inform the proposed Strategy refresh. Whaikaha will support the Board to work alongside government agencies to develop and progress the Strategy outcomes.

The Board Chair and Deputy Chair are available to meet with you when you have an opportunity to do so.

Recommendations

It is recommended that you:

- a) **Note** the information contained in the Annual Report 2022 - 2023. Noted ✓
- b) **Note** you will receive advice in February 2024 regarding potential candidates to fill the Board's current vacancies. Noted ✓
- c) **Indicate** if you would like to meet with the New Zealand Sign Language Board Chair and Deputy Chair in the first half of 2024 to discuss opportunities for NZSL in New Zealand, aligned with the work to refresh the current Strategy. Yes / No



Hon Penny Simmonds

Minister for Disability Issues

Date 13/01/24



Sheryl Pinckney

Group Manager, Partnerships and Stewardship

21 December 2023

Actions for private secretaries:

Work with Whaikaha to arrange for the NZSL Board Chair and Deputy Chair to meet with the Minister in 2024.

Appendix: Current Board members



**Rhian Yates
(Chair)**

As a parent of three Deaf children, with one currently in the education sector, Rhian brings a wealth of knowledge and experience from the Deaf community.

Rhian, based in Huntly, Waikato is actively involved in the Deaf community with experience of Deaf Education and Deaf sports groups. He played a part in New Zealand Sign Language Week.

Currently Rhian is a Tuhono-Connector at Enabling Good Lives, Waikato based in Hamilton. His role is working directly with disabled adults, disabled children, and their families and whānau to assist them to achieve Enabling Good Lives outcomes.

(Term ends 31 July 2024)



David McKee

Dr McKee is a recognised expert in NZSL and worked as the Research Director of the Deaf Studies Research Unit at Victoria University of Wellington until his recent retirement. He has extensive governance experience, including serving on the combined Board of the Deaf Education Centres and as chairperson of Deaf Aotearoa Holdings Limited. He was nominated by Deaf Aotearoa to be on the NZSL Board.

(Appointment effective from 1 July 2021 for a three-year term)



Catherine Greenwood

Working as an independent contractor, Catherine has a wealth of experience across the Deaf and hearing communities, with a history of participation in a range of organisations, including Auckland Deaf Society and early childhood providers for her children. She is currently completing her Masters in Language & Culture at Auckland University of Technology (AUT).

Catherine brings a strong knowledge of the challenges children face accessing and learning NZSL, linguistics, language planning and policies.

(Reappointment effective from 1 July 2022 for a three-year term)



Joanne Becker

Joanne has a broad knowledge of how government operates due to being a public servant. She has been involved in the Deaf community for many years including committee work for different groups. As a Board member she has a great understanding of issues and barriers the Deaf community face to support NZSL Board decisions.

(Appointment effective from 1 July 2022 for a three-year term)



Jaime Brown

Jaime is hearing and brings both personal and professional experience from the Deaf Community. With ten years' experience as a NZSL teacher and now a qualified NZSL interpreter. She previously owned a business that provided NZSL teaching services and demonstrates strong partnership and collaboration with Deaf people/organisations. Jaime has a strong focus and drive to make information and services accessible in NZSL.

(Appointment effective from 1 July 2022 for a three-year term)

Prepared by: Rachel Barnes, Senior Advisor, NZSL Team

Responsible manager: Sheryl Pinckney, Group Manager, Partnerships and Stewardship



Whaikaha

Ministry of Disabled People



Scan
for NZSL
name

New Zealand Sign
Language Board

2022 - 2023 Annual Report



Background

The New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006 gives NZSL language official status

- 1 New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is an official language of New Zealand. The purpose of the NZSL Act is to provide for official language status, to promote and maintain the use of NZSL, and to put standards around its use in particular circumstances, such as in legal proceedings.
- 2 NZSL is the language used by the New Zealand Deaf¹ community and is an integral part of Deaf culture. The Deaf community is described as being a distinct linguistic and cultural group of people who are deaf and who use NZSL as their preferred, and first, language.
- 3 NZSL is not a visual expression of the spoken English language. It is very different from English because it is a visual-gestural language and has different grammar and sentence structure. NZSL uses fewer words and is more direct than spoken English. In addition, rather than the use of separate words to form sentences (and therefore signing individual words), often NZSL uses one sign to cover phrases, sentences or concepts.

The Deaf Community is large and diverse across age, ethnicities and degrees of hearing impairment

- 4 The Deaf community can include people who are deaf or have varying degrees of hearing impairment, as well as family members of Deaf people and sign language interpreters.
- 5 Approximately 23,000 people use NZSL in New Zealand. This includes hearing parents who use NZSL to communicate with their Deaf children. As at the 2018 Census, in New Zealand, 7,647 people are profoundly Deaf, and 55,221 people had a lot of difficulty hearing.
- 6 As with any community, the Deaf community has diverse groups of people who experience life in different ways – for example, young, old, rural, urban, Turi Māori (Māori Deaf), Pacific Deaf, Deaf immigrants and refugees, rainbow Deaf, Deaf people with disabilities, and Children of Deaf Adults (CODAs).

¹ A capital 'D' is commonly used when referring to Deaf culture and the Deaf community. The NZSL Board uses 'Deaf' when referring to Deaf adults who identify with the Deaf/NZSL community. 'Hearing' is used to describe people who are not Deaf (i.e. have some level of hearing) from a Deaf perspective.

A small 'd' is commonly used for deaf people who have acquired a hearing impairment in later life, after they have acquired a spoken language.

- 7 Most Deaf NZSL users have been deaf since infancy. Ninety percent of Deaf children are born into hearing families, the majority of whom do not use NZSL. These adults learn NZSL alongside their children and NZSL is often not learnt until children are older. This can mean Deaf children do not have the same opportunity to develop foundational language skills, access learning and participate in society as their hearing peers do.
- 8 Delayed access to a fully visual language like NZSL can result in language deprivation which has far-reaching developmental and educational impacts. As a result, written English is inaccessible to many Deaf people, and is not an adequate substitute for NZSL.
- 9 Like any group of people who share a common language and similar life experiences, Deaf people have their own culture which is fundamentally about valuing and celebrating Deafhood. This includes beliefs, attitudes, history, social norms, values, literary traditions, and art.

The NZSL Board was established in 2014 to provide expert advice on NZSL matters²

10 The purpose of the NZSL Board (the Board), as set out in its Terms of Reference (ToR), is to:

- Maintain and promote the use of NZSL by ensuring development, preservation, and acquisition of the language.
- Provide expert advice on NZSL to government and the community.
- Ensure the rights of Deaf NZSL users as outlined in:
 - the NZSL Act 2006
 - the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)
 - other national and relevant international legislation.

11 The Board works towards a vision, as outlined in the ToR, where:

- NZSL is a strong, vibrant language, recognised and embraced by New Zealand society.
- The right to use NZSL as a first or preferred language is acknowledged.
- There are sufficient opportunities and resources for Deaf people, their families and whānau, and other NZSL users to acquire and use NZSL.
- NZSL is accessible and available to all NZSL users.

² SOC (14) 57

12 The Board has up to 10 members appointed by the Minister for Disability Issues. All members are NZSL users, and a majority of members are Deaf NZSL users. The ToR specifies that a minimum of two Board members must identify as Māori. At the time of this Annual Report, the Board has five members and up to five vacancies.

13 Since its establishment, the Board has developed a national NZSL language strategy, progressed engagement on options for accrediting NZSL interpreters and proficiency, supported the development of the NZSL Dictionary, and established te rōpū Kaitiaki to provide guidance and advice to the Board on matters important to Turi Māori. These projects are expanded on below.

14 Whaikaha has an NZSL team that provides support for the Board.

The Board and Whaikaha work together to administer funding that supports the Board to undertake its activities

15 The Board and Whaikaha together administer \$1.94 million per year:

- \$1.69 million supports the functioning of the Board and the team within Whaikaha, and the provision of contracts (e.g. the development of the NZSL Dictionary).
- The Board also distributes up to \$250,000 each year as grants for community-led initiatives to promote and maintain NZSL.

16 The below image is from a YouTube video of Cruze Kapa signing 'Ehara I te Mea' – 'Not the Thing' in NZSL. Cruze is standing outside with flowers and bushes behind him. The sign he is doing is for the line 'Nō nga tupuna' – 'From the ancestors'.



17 The grant funding round opens in February/March each year and decisions are made and announced by the middle of each year. The Minister for Disability Issues is generally given the option to announce the community grant recipients if he/she wants to.

A highlight for the Board was its involvement in gifting Whaikaha its New Zealand Sign Language name

- 18 Whaikaha – Ministry of Disabled People is the first Government agency to have its name in English, te reo Māori and NZSL.
- 19 A panel including NZSL Board members, te rōpū Kaitiaki (see below for more detail on this group) and other Deaf and NZSL-related organisations created three signs as options for the name.
- 20 The sign voted on by the Deaf community and gifted to the Ministry is the one-handed tree, turning and moving upwards, reflecting the rata vine which is part of the Whaikaha visual brand.

The Board's work programme sits within the NZSL Strategy 2018-2023

- 21 The Board developed the NZSL Strategy 2018 – 2023, to drive a work programme that promotes and maintains NZSL as an official language of NZ. The Board will be undertaking a strategy refresh in 2024 for the next five years, and, with agreement from agencies, the strategy will include an Action Plan for each government agency.
- 22 The current strategy is centred around internationally recognised language planning priorities. These language priorities form the strategy's strategic priorities, set out below:

Acquisition - the learning of language

- Deaf children and young people become fully proficient in NZSL.
- The Deaf community and other members of society can learn NZSL.

Use/Access - the ability to use language

- Enable NZSL to be used in all domains of society.
- Promote social equality for Deaf NZSL users by ensuring they have access to information and services through NZSL.

Attitude - beliefs and opinions towards the language

- The Deaf community has a critical awareness and appreciation of NZSL as a valid language and believes that NZSL is recognised and valued by New Zealanders.
- Families and whānau of deaf children, and the professionals who work with them, recognise and value NZSL and understand the benefits of using NZSL early with deaf children.
- Government agencies, Crown entities and New Zealanders recognise NZSL as a language and demonstrate inclusive attitudes and practices

towards NZSL users, including recognising the importance and value of NZSL to the Deaf community.

Documentation - systematic recording of language use for research and reference

- Development and maintenance of comprehensive records of NZSL that enable current and future use, promote understanding and enable further analysis of the language.

Status - how a language is regarded by its users and others

- Development of a positive environment for the use of NZSL, including determining what rights are given to NZSL users through legislation, policy and practice and the position of NZSL in society – enhancing how NZSL is viewed and used.

23 Projects and activities undertaken under each of these strategic priorities are summarised below.

Priority 1: Acquisition

Projects that were progressed and/or received funding to promote the acquisition of NZSL are outlined below.

Supporting the NZSL Proficiency Interview (NZSLPI) service

24 The Board supports investment of \$80,000 per annum in the NZSL Proficiency Interview (NZSLPI) service, an evidence-based language assessment tool used by trained assessors to determine an individual's proficiency in NZSL.

25 Funding also covers costs for training seven new assessors and providing ongoing professional development to maintain consistent assessment practice with the eight existing assessors.

26 An SLPI Advisory Group was established in 2022 to provide expert advice on the delivery of the NZSL Proficiency Assessment Service. It concluded that further support should be provided to Whaikaha to manage the service, including supporting it to develop resources for those who use the service.

Supporting infrastructure and leadership capability for the NZSL teaching profession

27 The Board provided funding of \$160,000 over two years to support and strengthen the New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association (NZSLTA). Funding enables NZSLTA to employ staff to manage its strategic planning, secretariat function and operations (resources, professional development and registration), with the goal of delivering quality teaching and learning across New Zealand.

Development and maintenance of NZSLTA TeachSign website

28 The Board provided funding of \$50,100 over three years (2023 – 2026) to support NZSLTA to hold committee meetings and maintain the TeachSign website - a central repository of information and resources for teachers, tutors, and students of NZSL, and to update the Registration Advisory Panel certification process for NZSL tutors.

Developing a high-quality interpreter workforce

29 The Board led consultation and engagement with local Deaf communities, NZSL interpreters and stakeholders around the country, to seek feedback on the adoption of the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI³) as the potential new interpreter standards system for NZSL interpreters.

30 Work will continue into 2024 on the assessment of the suitability of NAATI for NZSL interpreters, and other workforce matters such as qualification attainment and access to ongoing professional development.

Supporting the delivery of free NZSL learning opportunities

31 The Board provided funding of \$65,000 for Merge NZ to deliver free NZSL learning opportunities across New Zealand. 180 students were involved in learning opportunities between 30 August 2022 to 30 August 2023.

Supporting professional learning and development for NZSL tutors

32 The Board provided funding of \$35,000 for Merge NZ to deliver professional learning and development workshops for advanced (Level 3) NZSL tutors nationwide.

Priority 2: Use/Access

The projects and programmes supported by the Board to promote the access and use of NZSL are outlined below.

Supporting Turi (Deaf) Māori to access te reo

33 The Board set aside funding of \$150,000 per year to support te rōpū Kaitiaki, an advisory group to the Board, to provide cultural advice to the Board to address barriers Turi (Deaf) Māori experience in accessing te ao Māori.

³ NAATI is an Australian system of national standards and certification for translators and interpreters. The system aims to raise the standard of people working as translators and interpreters. The New Zealand Government decided to adopt NAATI in NZ in 2017 for all spoken languages and has been working on its implementation, so that people can effectively interact with government services.

34 Te rōpū Kaitiaki has developed a Turi Māori strategy and five-year action plan for accessing te ao Māori and launched several videos translating waiata and karakia into NZSL. Work will continue into 2024 on the implementation of the strategy and the action plan, including potentially aligning it more closely with the NZSL Strategy refresh.

Supporting the delivery of governance training workshops

35 The Board provided funding of \$25,000 per year to fund four workshops to develop governance capability and succession planning for the NZSL and other Boards. The workshops aim to close the skill gap required between local community governance arrangements and skills required for a government advisory board.

Supporting the community to access community grants

36 The Board held engagement meetings in different parts of the country in 2022, to support understanding and capability to access NZSL Community Grant applications.

37 The below image is from the YouTube video of Emmie Bensley signing Me He Manu Rere in NZSL. Emmie is signing “Kua rere ki tō moenga” with her hands out close to her chest like a bird with little wings who is about to fly.



Supporting the development of “The Wall Walk”

Hoki whakamuri, kia anga whakamua – Look to the past to help forge the future.

Kia whakatōmuri te haere whakamua – I walk backwards into the future with my eyes fixed on the past.

38 The Board provided funding for workshops, including three delivered in NZSL, designed to educate, and explore the history of bi-cultural, Crown and Māori relations from 1850. The workshops provided an education on the history of Māori and Crown relations to support Turi Māori and Deaf community members that have not had access to this information until now. The workshops raise awareness of the generational impacts of events on Māori, Pacific people, and vulnerable groups.

Priority 2: Attitude

Areas of work under this priority are outlined below.

Promoting NZSL nationally across the country

39 Deaf Aotearoa has been funded \$660,000 to promote NZSL nationally from 2024 to 2026. Promotion activity will include signing challenges, media training, podcasts, and engaging via social media influencers and content creators. Deaf Aotearoa will work with Turi Māori and Deaf Pacific people to create booklets in NZSL incorporating Māori and Pacific concepts.

40 All NZSL resources Deaf Aotearoa produces under this contract will be accessible to the community.

Promoting NZSL through understanding barriers to collaboration

41 The Board provided funding of \$35,000 to the Centre for Not-for-Profit Governance and Leadership (known as LEAD) to engage with various community groups to build relationships and gather information about potential barriers to collaboration within the community.

Priority 4: Documentation

Areas of work under this priority are outlined below.

Supporting the development of the online NZSL Dictionary

42 The Board committed to providing funding of \$601,013 from 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2026 to the Deaf Studies Research Unit at the Research Trust of Victoria University for ongoing development of the online NZSL Dictionary. Ackama NZ also received \$268,987 over 1 July 2023 to 30 June 2026 to host and maintain the web application.

43 The dictionary allows users to search for NZSL vocabulary through either English or te reo words or by the visual features of signs themselves. For the period 1 May 2022 to 1 May 2023, the dictionary received an average of 4,656 daily page views.

Priority 5: Status

Areas of work under this priority are outlined below.

Review of the NZSL Act 2006

44 The Board worked in partnership with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD) on developing and consulting on policy proposals to amend the NZSL Act. MSD, the Board and Whaikaha promoted the consultation in accessible ways through various networks and social media channels.

45 In April 2023, Cabinet agreed to amend the NZSL Act so that:

- The Board becomes a statutory Ministerial advisory group with additional functions and powers to provide strategic leadership on matters relating to NZSL, and independent advice to the Minister for Disability Issues.
- It sets out the purpose and core functions of the statutory Ministerial advisory group, which could include gathering information from government agencies about their actions relating to NZSL, along with principles to guide appointments to the statutory Ministerial advisory group.
- It recognises and supports Turi Māori identity and leadership.

The Board commissioned a survey to assess satisfaction with its performance against the NZSL Strategy

46 A survey was run inviting feedback on the delivery of the NZSL Strategy. A total of 584 NZSL users responded to the survey, exceeding the target of 500 completed surveys. Questions were based on the five priority areas and the information will be used to help the Board make informed decisions on actions to maintain and promote NZSL, ahead of the Strategy refresh in 2024.

47 A summary of findings are listed below, with full results available online⁴.

48 Respondents reported that informal learning and community-based programmes were the most popular modes of acquisition of NZSL, and generally greater levels of satisfaction with the content covered in NZSL classes and the cost of classes. Respondents however, reported dissatisfaction with the location and the availability of NZSL classes.

49 Respondents reported that using NZSL to communicate can be challenging, particularly in public spaces or where there are large gatherings with multiple speakers. Barriers included mask use during the COVID-19 pandemic, the cost and availability of interpreters, the lack of awareness around Deaf culture and the lack of effort to learn and use NZSL.

50 Several comments and ideas were made in relation to lifting the status of NZSL as an official language of NZ, some of which will be considered as part of the Strategy refresh work in 2024. Ideas centre around the acquisition of language in the early years of child development, and in education settings as part of the curriculum. Other comments centred around the need for acknowledgement of discrimination against Deaf people and the resulting education gaps and deprivation of people in the Deaf community.

⁴ <https://www.odi.govt.nz/nzsl/news/nzsl-community-survey-results-2022/>