

Report

Date: 25 June 2021 **Security Level:** IN CONFIDENCE
To: Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Disability Issues
From: Brian Coffey, Director, Office for Disability Issues
Report No: REP/21/5/549

New Zealand Sign Language Board Annual Report 2021

Purpose of the report

1. The New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Board (Board) is required under its Terms of Reference to provide an annual report to summarise the progress that has been made towards the maintenance and promotion of NZSL, as set out in the NZSL Strategy (2018-2023).
2. This year's annual report outlines the Board's achievements between August 2020 and June 2021, and the focus of the Board and Secretariat's work for the next financial year.

Executive Summary

3. The Board's work programme was impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Recovery has been steady and the work programme is again on track.
4. Key achievements include the following:
 - a. The Board has strengthened its commitment to Māori Deaf. It has provided opportunities for Māori Deaf to improve their capacity and capability for engagement and leadership, and improved access to NZSL:
 - NZSL interpreters were provided at the lower Marae for the annual commemorations at the Waitangi Treaty Grounds.
 - Work was progressed on the recommendations of the report the Board commissioned on access to Te Ao Māori in NZSL by Māori Deaf.
 - Terms of reference were developed for the rōpū kaitiaki to guide the Board's decisions pertaining to Māori Deaf.
 - Two rangatahi Māori were invited to observers Board meetings.
 - b. The programme of stakeholder and community engagement was sustained.
 - c. The Board continued its work to improve Deaf community capability and capacity via governance workshops and through support for the NZSL Teaching and Interpreting sectors.
 - d. The Board continued to make strategic investments in projects that align with the NZSL Strategy. This work included:
 - Making videos about two young Deaf people and their experiences of the education system.
 - Investigating the accessibility of NZSL translations of government and high stakes information for the Deaf community.

- Allocating one-off additional funding to Deaf community organisations to run events during NZSL week.
 - Further work on interpreter standards, and interpreter workforce capacity.
 - Provision of NZSL proficiency assessments for people working with Deaf children.
- e. Data sources have been identified to measure progress against the NZSL Strategy and relevant agencies are being consulted on the indicators.
- f. Guidelines have been commissioned to help agencies understand how to meet their obligations under the NZSL Act, 2006 and work is underway to review the NZSL Act.
5. The following priorities have been set for the year ahead:
- g. Continued commitment to Māori Deaf.
- h. Continued work to lift the quality, capability and capacity of NZSL interpreting and teaching.
- i. Continued strategic investment, including:
- inviting proposals focusing on the Documentation aspect of the NZSL Strategy;
 - delivering NZSL translation workshops;
 - progressing work to improve community cohesion and collective impact through a hui with key Deaf community organisations; and
 - further community governance workshops.

What was achieved since June 2020?

The Board strengthened its commitment to Māori Deaf

6. In 2019, the *Hono ki te hāpori turi Maori* report was commissioned to help the Board to better understand the needs of the Māori Deaf community.
7. Initial work to contract a supplier to develop a long-term strategy was not successful because the preferred supplier did not have the capacity available to carry out the work. This led to a stronger examination of how Māori Deaf-led governance could be included in the Board space and a fresh approach was developed. This includes establishment of a rōpū kaitiaki to support Board decision making.
8. The terms of reference for the rōpū kaitiaki have been approved by the Board and regional hui will be held between July and October to explain its purpose. Applications will open in October and membership will be considered by the Board at its November 2021 Board meeting.

Related Board initiatives

9. The Board held a hui with Māori Deaf at Rūaumoko marae to discuss the findings of the *Hono ki te hāpori turi Māori* report. You attended this hui, demonstrating the Government's commitment to better outcomes for Māori Deaf.
10. The Board committed in May 2020 to a five year plan for Māori Deaf. It established the role of Taura Tautoko to provide cultural advice to the Board and to ensure it understood its responsibilities under Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
11. Two rangatahi Māori were selected to observe Board meetings. This was to help grow sector capacity and capability, and to support succession planning in the Māori Deaf community.

12. NZSL interpreters were provided for incidental interpreting at the lower marae for the February 2021 Waitangi Day commemorations. This was a one off allocation of funds in order to understand the costs and the effectiveness of the approach. NZSL interpreters are normally provided for the formal aspect of the dawn service, but not for the rest of the day on the lower marae where stalls and organisations promoting services are available.
13. In May 2021, the Board and ODI met with Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori to learn about their language planning processes and to identify ways of working together to progress Māori Deaf access to te Reo Māori through NZSL, especially in regards to improving the competency of NZSL interpreters in Te Reo Māori.

Stakeholder and community engagement

14. The Board and Deaf Aotearoa signed a Memorandum of Understanding outlining the relationship between the two organisations, and their intention to identify areas to collaborate on in supporting access to NZSL and to provide complementary advice to government when appropriate.
15. The Board and ODI completed its programme of community meetings, some of which had been delayed due to COVID-19. The meetings were held to promote the work of the Board and to encourage communities to think about how they can maintain and promote NZSL locally. The meetings were also used by the Board to build their understanding of the diversity of the Deaf community in terms of accessing NZSL, especially in smaller towns and rural areas.

Building community Capability and Capacity

16. The Board supports the development of effective governance skills in the sector as part of its strategic approach:
 - a. Two governance workshops will be offered each year for local Deaf communities. This will help lift capability within local Deaf clubs and national Deaf organisations. In 2021, community governance workshops were provided in Christchurch and Palmerston North, which has garnered positive feedback. A workshop is scheduled for Whangārei in October.
 - b. Governance workshops were funded for the Sign Language Interpreters Association (SLIANZ) and the New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association (NZSLTA). These organisations have an important role to play in the maintenance and promotion of NZSL therefore
17. The Board is developing a work programme to improve community cohesion and to strengthen the collective impact on the maintenance and promotion of NZSL. Work with the Deaf community to capture common themes for further investigation has started. The Board expects to report further on this in its next report.

Strategic investment of the NZSL fund

Commissioning

18. A report on how deaf children and youth access and use NZSL was completed, and has been shared with the Ministry of Education, Ko Taku Reo Deaf Education, and providers of services to deaf children and youth. A new video resource sharing the experiences deaf youth in the education system will be released soon.

19. A new translation quality and systems project focuses on the quality of NZSL in translations. Focus groups were set up to gauge the accessibility of high-stakes information being translated into NZSL. A report will be available at the end of June and a workshop will be organised to deliver professional development and further training for those who currently work on providing NZSL translations.
20. NZSL interpreter competency descriptors were developed in September 2020 as a step towards establishing post-graduation/work force standards. The Ministry of Business, Innovation and Enterprise (MBIE) has set the standard for spoken language interpreters using an Australian-based certification system. Consultation is currently underway to seek NZSL stakeholder views on a proposal to apply this system to delivery by the NZSL interpreter workforce. If the approach is considered to be effective, then funding managed by MBIE will support much of this work.
21. Increasing levels of NZSL proficiency, especially in education contexts, is a key priority of the NZSL Strategy. The Board will fund the development and delivery of the NZSL Proficiency Assessment Service, picking up a project originally led by the Ministry of Education, to assess the NZSL skills of adults. A closed tender failed to identify a preferred supplier so the service will be managed by ODI for the next three years. This represents significant additional work for the Secretariat. The service, for up to 80 funded assessments per year, will initially prioritise adults working closely with Deaf children. In the longer term, the service will be opened to other government agencies to support increased skilled use of NZSL in the public service.
22. Tenders for NZSL Week services for 2023-2025 are expected to open in September 2021. The Board has commissioned a social impact evaluation to test whether the procurement requirements are optimal for achieving the desired outcomes for the maintenance and promotion of NZSL. The focus is on the impact of NZSL Week over time rather than on the services supplied, with which the Board and ODI are satisfied.

Grants

23. Each year, the Deaf community are invited to apply for grants to support the use of NZSL in their local communities through regional or national initiatives.
24. The Board granted Deaf Aotearoa an additional \$200,000 in 2021 to support applications from the Deaf community to run local events during NZSL week.
25. Round 9 of the NZSL community grants received a low number of applications with only three being successful. The number of applications may have been impacted by the large number of community projects delayed by Covid-19, with a total of 31 Round 8 projects awaiting completion, limiting capacity within the Deaf community for planning and delivering Round 9 projects. The offering of NZSL Week grants at the same time as the NZSL community grants may also have impacted capacity.

Monitoring against the NZSL Strategy 2018-2023

26. The purpose of the NZSL Strategy is to address the critical and ongoing need for effective language planning. Part of the monitoring process is to develop indicators against the five international language planning priorities: Acquisition, Use/Access, Attitude, Documentation, and Status.
27. Draft indicators and data sources have been identified and shared with a wide range of government agencies and other stakeholders, including Turi Māori, for feedback.

28. The existing data sources identified to date include the Public Service Census, Ministry of Education administrative data (including NZSL use in early learning services, and secondary student enrolment in NZSL courses), the StatsNZ *Kiwis Count Survey*, and *What about me?* - a nation-wide survey of young people, including NZSL users.
29. A new data source will be a national survey for the NZSL community. This could include some more-subjective measures of specific interest to the Deaf community. This survey is expected to be available from September 2021.
30. To strengthen the understanding of key government agency work and how it can contribute to realisation of the NZSL Strategy, representatives from the ministries of Health, Education, Justice, and Social Development have been invited to attend Board meetings to share thinking.

Review of the New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006 (the Act)

31. The MSD Disability policy team is currently looking at the options for strengthening the NZSL Act. Consideration is also being given to how other legislation, especially through the Accelerating Accessibility legislation work programme, may strengthen access to NZSL.
32. A 2020 scoping review of the Act revealed that agencies generally either did not know what their obligations were under the Act, or did not understand how to meet them.
33. Guidance for government agencies on their obligations under the Act has been commissioned to assist them to measure and report on their progress. This online resource is expected to be completed by July 2021.

Priorities for the year ahead

Māori Deaf development

34. The increased Board commitment to Māori Deaf development work needs to be guided by Māori Deaf themselves. This engagement is being supported by a series of hui held in Whangārei, Auckland, Hamilton, Napier, Wellington, and Christchurch.
35. The focus of ngā hui will be the findings of the *Hono ki te hāpori turi Māori* report, access to Te Ao Māori for Māori Deaf, and the role of the rōpū kaitiaki being established to guide the Board in their decision making around Māori Deaf.
36. A call for applications for membership on the rōpū kaitiaki will open in October in readiness for consideration by the Board at its November 2021 meeting.
37. When the hui are completed and the rōpū kaitiaki is established, work will progress on a long term Māori Deaf strategy to guide the Board in its Māori Deaf work.

Strengthening the NZSL teaching sector

38. The NZSL teaching sector includes the NZSL Teacher's Association (NZSLTA), Victoria University of Wellington and several businesses offering NZSL teaching. These are important contributors to the maintenance and promotion of NZSL.
39. The NZSLTA has struggled to improve its capability and capacity.
40. The Board has invested strategically to support sector development through its deployment of the NZSL Fund. It has supported NZSLTA to develop teaching resources, and to access governance training and professional development. The Board will explore ways to further lift NZSLTA's capability and to ensure NZSL teaching and learning is successful.

Current operation of the Board and the Secretariat

41. The Board continues to operate efficiently and effectively to progress realisation of the NZSL Strategy. Strategic use is made of online tools and alternative meeting options.
42. The Secretariat continues to serve the Board well, consistently meeting all deliverables to a high standard. However, the workload of the Secretariat continues to increase. Consideration is being given to how to better match staff capacity and deployment with work programme demands.
43. The Board's work programme deliverables are appropriately focused on the NZSL Strategy outcomes, with all work requested of the Secretariat being considered by the Board to be equally important.
44. The NZSL Secretariat is now more akin to a programme office for the Board, with much of the work focussed on procuring projects from third parties, as well as the more traditional activities of administering the community grants and providing administrative support for the Board.
45. The shift to more strategic procurement of projects, funding multi-year projects of strategic significance, and lifting the level of community engagement alongside the provision of community grants, will be effective in progressing the NZSL Strategy.
46. The challenge is ensuring the NZSL Board secretariat/programme office is sufficiently resourced from the NZSL funds to undertake the work associated with this broader range of approaches.
47. The additional funding from Budget 2019 has made all this possible.



Rhian Yates
Chairperson, New Zealand Sign Language Board

26 June 2021

Date



Brian Coffey
Director, Office for Disability Issues

25. JUNE 2021

Date

Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

Note that the New Zealand Sign Language Board continued to undertake its responsibilities during 2020/21 as established by Cabinet in 2014, including through allocation of funding from the New Zealand Sign Language Fund.

Approve the report



Hon Carmel Sepuloni
Minister for Disability Issues

30/6/21

Date