

INQUIRY INTO AUSLAN INTERPRETATION FOR BROADCASTING

Organisation: Deaf Connect

Date Received: 5 August 2022

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The Committee Chair
Procedure Committee
NSW Legislative Council

Dear Committee Chair,

Re: Auslan interpretation for broadcasting

Deaf Connect write to provide a submission to the NSW Legislative Council's Procedure Committee into Auslan interpretation for broadcasting.

ABOUT US

Established in 1903 (Deaf Services Limited) and 1913 (The Deaf Society) respectively, Deaf Connect, is a not-for-profit, social impact organisation supporting Deaf, Deafblind, and hard of hearing communities across the country, with a focus on community and empowerment. Our mission is standing with the Deaf community, building capacity, and influencing social change. Deaf Connect offers a whole life range of services to support the community including early intervention and therapy services, accredited Auslan courses and community classes, Auslan translation and interpreting services, lifestyle support services, engagement, information, and referral services, including plan management and support coordination, aged care support and socialisation services. Deaf Connect are the largest Deaf, Deafblind, and hard of hearing specialist service provider in Australia with over 225 years of collective experience delivering quality services to the community across Australia in Auslan. Deaf Connect are also the largest employer of Deaf and hard of hearing people in Australia.

FACTS

- Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the sign language of the Australian Deaf community.
- Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is an accepted communication method recognised by the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI).
- Auslan is recognised as a community language (Dawkins, 1991).
- One in six Australian have some form of hearing loss, with that number projected to increase to one in four by 2050. Hearing loss is the second most prevalent national health issue yet remains the 8th national funding priority (Access Economics, 2006).
- According to the 2021 Census, there are 16,242 Auslan users in Australia.

DEFINITIONS

Deaf (with a capitalised D)

The term "Deaf" refers to those who use a sign language as their primary language and identify as culturally Deaf. Deaf people are more likely to have been born deaf or to have acquired a hearing loss early in life. This

group is relatively small, but not insignificant; there are over 16,000 recorded Deaf Auslan users in Australia. Deaf people typically tend to acquire sign language as their primary means of communication in addition to the written or spoken language of the wider community. They are not necessarily fluent in written English and proficiency should not be assumed.

Hard of hearing

The term “hard of hearing” is usually used to refer to those who use English rather than a signed language as their primary means of communication. Most people with a hearing loss (estimated at one in six Australians), belong to this group. People with acquired hearing loss will usually continue accessing information and interacting with those around them in English, whether spoken or written, and are well served by assistive technologies such as hearing aids, hearing loops, and captions.

deaf (with a lower-case d)

The term “deaf” is a more general term used to describe the physical condition of hearing loss and deafness, and to describe people who are deaf but do not identify as culturally Deaf.

Deafblind

Deafblindness is a unique and isolating sensory disability resulting from the combination of both a hearing and vision loss or impairment which significantly affects communication, socialisation mobility and daily living. There are two distinct cultural groups within the deafblind community. The first group are born blind and lose their hearing as adults. They tend to continue to use speech as their main communication and have a variety of hearing devices to help them to communicate. The second group are born deaf and lose their sight as adults; this group are culturally Deaf and use sign language to communicate¹.

Deafhood

Deafhood is a term coined by Paddy Ladd (2003) in his book, *Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood* which is the process of actualising deaf identity and conveying an affirmative and positive acceptance of being deaf.

Auslan

Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the signed language used by the Deaf Community in Australia and is the primary and preferred language of those who identify with the Deaf community. It is historically related to British Sign Language, as is New Zealand Sign Language, and has been influenced, to a lesser extent, by Irish Sign Language and American Sign Language. It is not a signed form of English, rather, it is a language with its own unique grammatical structures, which are different to that of English. As with any foreign language, many years of study are needed to acquire fluency.

Auslan/English Interpreter

Auslan/English Interpreters are professionally trained in facilitating communication between English and Auslan. Interpreters are credentialled through the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI), are adhere to the ASLIA Code of Ethics and Guidelines for Professional Conduct.

Deaf Interpreter

A Deaf Interpreter is trained and certified to convey meaning between Auslan and/or written English, and other signed languages. Deaf Interpreters may be required to work with clients who have limited

¹ <https://www.deafblind.org.au/deafblind-information/deafblindness-in-depth/>

conventional Auslan, have sensory or cognitive disabilities or with deaf migrants who are more familiar with foreign sign languages. Deaf Interpreters often work in tandem with (hearing) Auslan interpreters.

Varying the Standing Orders to Introduce Auslan interpreting in Legislative Council proceedings

Australia ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) in 2008. The CRPD requires governments to take all appropriate measures to ensure deaf people receive information, on an equal basis with others, through the provision of sign language interpreters. Consequently, Australian governments have a responsibility to ensure that Deaf Australians have access to all government information and announcements in Auslan, on an equal basis with others, not only when there is a health crisis or natural disaster. This enables deaf people to fully participate in social, economic, and civic life.

Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, Auslan interpreters were spotlighted, becoming permanent fixtures on Australian television screens. Most major free to air broadcasters complied with the code of practice, ensuring interpreters were in frame; however, commitment from governments to provide interpreters waned as pandemic announcements eased. This was particularly evident in New South Wales in October 2021 with a spokesperson from the Perrottet government stating, *“As NSW returns to a more normal setting, there will be some media events where the services of Auslan interpreters will not be requested²”*. However, as a signatory of the CRPD, Australian governments are required to ensure deaf people receive information on an equal basis with others through the provision of interpreters. Auslan needs to be a routine feature of the New South Wales government’s communications outside of emergencies.

Varying the Standing Orders must grant Auslan interpreters’ access to the chamber floor to interpret alongside members of Parliament, not simply being relegated to a broadcast studio. As Independent Senator David Pocock stated in his First Speech³ to Parliament on 2 August 2022, this is the difference between access and inclusion. Access ensures that every member of the community can use the physical environment, transport, information, and services equally. However, inclusion moves beyond that by recognising that attitudes and expectations may exclude people, just as much as lack of access and connectedness and belonging.

It is important for the Procedure Committee to understand that there is national shortage of Auslan interpreters which restricts access to communication for the community. The National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) provides the following distinctions:

Certified Paraprofessional Interpreter (formerly known as Level 2)

This represents a level of competence in interpreting for the purpose of general conversations. Paraprofessional Interpreters generally undertake the interpretation of non-specialist dialogues. Practitioners at this level are encouraged to obtain Professional-Level accreditation.

² <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/lack-of-auslan-interpreters-at-nsw-press-conferences-slammed/18nmyen9k>

³ <https://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/david-pocock-vows-to-champion-accessibility-inclusion-in- maiden-speech-with-auslan-interpreter/5o91ud694>

Certified Interpreter (formerly known as Level 3)

This represents the minimum level of competence for professional interpreting and is the minimum level recommended by NAATI for work in most settings, including banking, law, health, and social and community services.

In NSW there are currently 155 credentialled Auslan interpreters, of which 107 are certified provisional and 47 are certified. With almost 4,000 Deaf Auslan users in NSW, there are not enough interpreters available to meet current demands. To address current supply issues and develop a sustainable workforce, the NSW government must invest in education pathways to increase the supply of interpreters. This can be achieved by recognising Auslan as a priority workforce area to provide free TAFE. Workforce issues also include a lack of Deaf interpreters, Teachers of the Deaf and qualified Deaf Awareness Trainers. It is particularly difficult for Deaf people to attain these qualifications and further consultation with the Deaf community is needed to determine how best to address barriers to education.

The Procedure Committee must also understand that whilst closed captions are an effective tool for deaf people whose first language is English, or for those who have acquired hearing loss later in life, they are not an appropriate solution for culturally deaf people who primarily use Auslan. Many argue that closed captions are available in the absence of an Auslan interpreter, thus eliminating the need to provide interpreters at all. However, closed captions fail to convey tone and meaning, are often delayed or incomplete, and can be riddled with transcription errors. Closed captions do not have the capacity to capture cultural and linguistic nuances that would otherwise be conveyed through an Auslan interpreter and are not an acceptable substitute.

Recommendations

- The NSW government must genuinely commit to ensuring all announcements are accessible in Auslan.
- The NSW government must designate in-house Auslan interpreters for the broadcasting of parliamentary proceedings
- Standing Orders must be varied to allow Auslan interpreters on the chamber floor
- Funding must be allocated to increase the supply of Auslan interpreters
- In partnership with Deaf community, the NSW government must establish an Auslan taskforce. This taskforce must identify opportunities to strengthen, integrate and legislate policies to improve access to services and increase awareness of Auslan.

We thank the Procedure Committee for the opportunity to participate in this submission. Deaf Connect welcomes and encourages opportunities for the deaf community to be involved in any consultations to co-design strategies to address issues raised in this submission.

Sincerely,

Brett Casey
Chief Executive Officer
Deaf Connect