

# Report

**Date:** 14 November 2019      **Security Level:** IN CONFIDENCE

**To:** Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Social Development

**From:** Jacinda Keith – Acting Director, Office for Disability Issues

**Report No.** REP/19/11/1107

**EDRMS ID** A1498056

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## **New Zealand Sign Language Board Report 2019**

### **Purpose of the report**

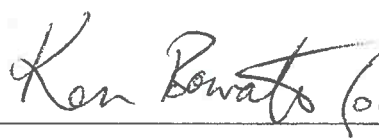
- 1 This report provides you with information on progress made by the New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Board (the Board) and NZSL Fund allocations from April to November 2019. This report fulfils a requirement in the Terms of Reference for the Board that they report to you on progress on an annual basis.
- 2 This report notifies you about the 12 NZSL community project applications to Round Six of the NZSL Fund that the Board has recommended for approval. The recommended grants total \$291,321 for the 2019/20 financial year.

### **Executive summary**

- 3 The Board membership has changed significantly since April 2019 with five new appointments and the new Board Chair.
- 4 The recommendation for the appointment of two new Māori Deaf members has also been provided. The Board will continue to engage with Māori Deaf leaders as part of its commitment to ongoing engagement and development within the Māori Deaf community.
- 5 The appointment of a new advisor to the Office for Disabilities Issues, to take up her role from the end of January 2020, will mean for the first time the Board will have the support of two designated Secretariat staff both fluent in NZSL.
- 6 The Board continues to fulfil its mandated responsibilities. A specialist governance advisor continues to support the Board's leadership, processes and documentation, positioning the Board well to continue to serve its mandated purposes.
- 7 The number of Deaf people learning and using NZSL is steady at 0.5% of the population. This means NZSL, one of New Zealand's official languages, remains a threatened language.
- 8 The NZSL Board has a total of \$1.645m per annum to allocate to activities designed to maintain and promote NZSL.
- 9 Allocation of the NZSL Fund during this period included the following.
  - Local initiatives that maintain and promote NZSL were considered early in the financial year, with Round 6 the contestable NZSL fund opening in August 2019. Applications were assessed and recommended against the priorities outlined in the

NZSL naturally within a community of users, contributing to its survival, sustainability and vitality. Grants totalling \$291,321 have been approved by the Ministry for Social Development for 2019/20 allocation, compared with \$363,204.23 in 2018/19.

- Significant investment in strategic projects that maintain and promote the quality of NZSL services in New Zealand.
  - Significant strategic investment in new ways of operating to lift the efficiency of the Board and Secretariat functions:
    - New board governance management software, providing for greater information security, easier information access and sharing within the Board and more efficient Board meeting and decision-making process.
    - New grant application management software, providing easier processes for applicants, and more transparent and efficient assessment processes. This has also reduced the need for Board meetings annually by at least one day.
- 10 The review of the Board size and operation will be completed in February 2020 with recommendations reported by April 2020.
- 11 The Board will work in partnership with key government agencies during 2020 to jointly plan for their collation, analysis and reporting of more NZSL-related data. This will provide for on-going monitoring of progress against the NZSL Strategy from 2020. The first phase of this will focus on reporting of data which is already being collected. A later phase will work to address the data gaps that are identified.
- 12 The Board has identified misalignment between the NZSL Act 2006 and the NZSL Strategy (2018-2023). The Board are considering options for addressing this, including the potential for a review of the Act. A review of the Act would also create an opportunity to review other aspects, such as the specification of NZSL provisions in education.

 Ken Bowater, *Smr Advisor, ODI*  
(on behalf of Rhian Yates)

13/11/2019

Rhian Yates  
Chair  
New Zealand Sign Language Board

Date



Jacinda Keith  
Acting Director  
Office for Disability Issues

13/11/2019.

Date

## Recommended actions

It is recommended that you:

**Note** that the New Zealand Sign Language Board continued to undertake its responsibilities during 2019/20 as established by Cabinet in 2014, including through allocation of funding from the New Zealand Sign Language Fund.

**Note** that operational improvements have been made, and that the planned review of Board size and operation will be completed in February 2020, with recommendations reported to you by April 2020.

**Agree** that the review of Board size will include DPO representation and mechanisms for accessing expert advice on areas such as Language Planning.

AGREE | DISAGREE

**Note** that 12 applications to Round 6 of the NZSL Fund, as listed in Annex A, have been recommended by the NZSL Board for funding.

**Agree** that you will make the announcement of the 12 successful applications for community grants.

AGREE | DISAGREE

**Agree** the Board is undertaking work to initiate a review of the NZSL Act 2006 to align the principles with the NZSL Strategy (2028-2023).

AGREE | DISAGREE

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Hon Carmel Sepuloni  
Minister for Disability Issues

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Date

## **New Board members: fresh perspectives**

1. The current Board has a total of seven members with remaining terms ranging from eight months to 18 months.
2. A number of community engagement meetings were held around the country in March and April 2019 to support the nomination and appointment process. The meetings were successful in generating nominations and the subsequent appointment of five new Board members to represent the Deaf and New Zealand Sign Language community in New Zealand. The process and recommendation were reported to you on 4 June 2019 (REP/19/06/489).
3. The induction of new members focussed on understanding the context and current work of the Board as a Government advisory group. Past and current members of the Board participated in the induction to maintain continuity on the priorities for the maintenance and promotion of NZSL.

### *Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) representation*

4. The Disabled Persons Organisation (DPO) position became vacant on 4 September 2019 after the appointed member stepped down from the Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand (DANZ) Executive Board. This was reported to you in the Disability Issues Update period ending 13 September 2019.
5. Nominations for the DPO representative position are made by the DANZ Executive Board, which is holding its triennial elections this month. The appointment confirmation process for this position are as for all other NZSL Board members. The NZSL Secretariat will work with DANZ to maintain input from the DPO between meetings until a new appointment is made.

### *Māori Deaf appointments*

6. A targeted approach was required to generate nominations from within the Māori Deaf community. A partnership between the Board and community was established to build confidence and understanding in the work of the Board, resulting in two recommendations for appointment, as reported to you on 24 September 2019 (REP/19/9/941).

## **Responding to the needs of the Māori Deaf community**

7. Engagement with the Māori Deaf community has been an area of focus for the Board. A total of 12% (\$495,384.80) of the NZSL Fund was allocated to community grants, scholarships and a national hui to support the needs and interests of the Māori Deaf community over the past five years.
8. A key priority for the Board has been building capacity and capability within the Māori Deaf community to lift access to NZSL in Te Ao Maori and all other domains. The Board commissioned a project, Hono ki te Hapōri Turi, to engage with leaders to identify Māori Deaf priority areas for the maintenance and promotion of NZSL.
9. In October 2019, the Board further cemented this partnership relationship by allocating NZSL funds to maintain engagement with Māori Deaf leaders and at the same time supporting succession planning for Māori Deaf leadership by investing in rangitahi (Māori Youth), building experience in a government context.

## **The New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) Board (the Board) continues to fulfil its mandated responsibilities**

### *Board operations and review*

10. A proposed review of the Board composition and size was described to you on 15 April 2019 (REP/19/4/282). This outlined operational challenges, including making appointments, and some potential benefits of a smaller Board size. This review will be completed by the end of February 2020 to allow new Board members time to settle into their new roles and therefore fully participate in the process.
11. The scope of this review will include all Board positions including DPO representation and the mechanisms of accessing expert advice on language planning. Not included in the scope is the role of the two Board members who identify as Māori.
12. Recent Board membership changes have reduced the challenge of managing conflicts of interest. The Board agenda is guided by a new Chair, Rhian Yates, who was appointed in 24 July 2019 (REP/19/07/662) and Catherine Greenwood, appointed by the Board as deputy Chair on 11 September 2019.
13. Governance training continues to support Board member understanding of their role as individuals and of the collective responsibility of the Board.
14. Board policy and procedures have been reviewed to reflect the separation between the governance role of the Board and the work of the Secretariat. This clarification has enabled the Board to progress areas of work towards achieving the outcomes of the NZSL Strategy (2018-2023), including more efficient assessment of applications for NZSL Fund community grants.
15. Management of Board materials and communications has been enhanced with the use of Board management Software currently under trial. This software supports the efficiency of Board work within and outside of meetings by providing a secure portal to access information and communication between Board members and the Secretariat.

### *Collaboration between Boards*

16. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is under development with the Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand (DANZ) Executive Board. This agreement outlines the relationship between the two governance bodies and the opportunities for collaboration to support Deaf community members and NZSL in New Zealand. The boards maintain their awareness that the NZSL Board's mandate relates to NZSL, and not the wider issues of interest to the DANZ Board.

### *Guidance during a time of technological innovations*

17. The Board adopted the joint World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) and the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) statement on the use of signing avatars dated 14 April 2018.
18. The statement provides guidance on the use of signing avatars in providing access in sign languages as a replacement of human signers. In particular, the risks associated with translation and interpreting by an avatar. However, the statement recognises the potential for avatars to be part of the future service mix where work is guided by Deaf people as native users of the language.

## **The vitality of NZSL: NZSL remains a threatened language.**

19. Census 2018 results states that 22,986 people can use New Zealand Sign Language, maintaining use in 0.5% of the population as reported in the 2013 Census results. NZSL remains a threatened language.

### *NZSL Strategy targets and measures*

20. Effective language planning is supported by the NZSL Strategy (2018-2023), focussing on five key priorities essential for the maintenance and promotion of the language.
21. The Board have developed targets and measures to track progress against the NZSL Strategy (2018-2023). A draft document will be available for consultation with other government agencies from February 2020 to establish reporting timelines for annual reporting.

### *Language planning*

22. The Board engaged with a sign language planning expert to understand the critical actions required for a thriving and healthy language. These underpin the NZSL Strategy (2018-2023). This content highlighted the opportunity for the Board to work with the Deaf community, the 'heartland' of NZSL, to ensure the vitality of the language.
23. A comprehensive approach to community engagement is planned for the first half of 2020 to grow knowledge of the Board role and to support more communities to develop local projects for funding consideration that will maintain and promote NZSL.

## **Investment of the NZSL Fund to maintain and promote NZSL**

### *Community grants – local initiatives*

24. Each year, the NZSL community have an opportunity to apply for funding to support local initiatives. This is the first year that that fund was able to open early in the financial year, enabling the Board to consider a range of strategic projects alongside its community investment for the year ahead. We will continue to work towards bringing this timeframe forward to benefit from the full financial year for a variety of NZSL projects that maintain and promote the language.
25. Round six of the contestable process was open in August 2019, inviting projects that align with the NZSL Strategy priorities. The Board considered the 17 applications and have recommended 12 grants for the 2019/20 financial year totalling \$291,321. Details of the successful applications are attached at Annex A.
26. We aim to notify applicants of the outcome by the end of November 2019 and a list of the successful applications added to the NZSL Board webpage.

### *The balance between 'grassroots' and government actions*

27. The distribution of NZSL Funds between 2015 – 2019 was analysed to understand the range of investments against the priorities of the NZSL Strategy (2018-2023). The highest proportion of community projects promoted the use and access of NZSL [a priority area of the NZSL Strategy], in the form of activities, resources or creating Deaf Spaces for the use of NZSL.
28. The proportion of funds distributed between community grants and strategic projects has shifted over these five years. Initially, the majority of funding was allocated via the contestable community grants process. This year's grants represent the lowest proportion awarded via the contestable process. This reflects the approach taken by the Board to also progress the strategic tasks required to support the vitality of NZSL.

### *Knowing what is needed – strategic projects*

29. The NZSL fund increased from \$1,250,000 in Budget 2018 to \$1,645,000 from the Budget 2019. This increase enabled the ongoing funding of core activities that support the vitality of NZSL, such as investing in NZSL week which aligns with 'attitude' as a strategic priority and maintaining the NZSL online dictionary which documents the language for users. These two activities total \$442,000 annually and are contracted for the next three years.
30. Several strategic investments were agreed in October 2019 focussing on NZSL sector development. They are:
  - a. Contracting the New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association (NZSLTA) to develop and deliver a range of professional development opportunities to NZSL teachers nationally and develop a five-year strategic plan.
  - b. Establishing an adult assessment service using the Sign Language Proficiency Interview (SLPI) tool to measure the fluency of adult NZSL users.
  - c. A NZSL Sector Development workshop to promote collaboration between NZSL professions, namely Sign Language Interpreters, NZSL teachers and the adult NZSL assessment service.
  - d. Creating a trial NZSL Online hub page that will provide NZSL users with a central place to find links to all relevant information about NZSL. Decisions about the purpose and function of a permanent NZSL online hub are still being explored by the Board and community.
  - e. Developing NZSL Interpreter Standards, post-graduation. This work will be progressed alongside a Language Assistance Service (LAS) multiagency project led by the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE). This approach ensures that the access needs of Deaf clients are viewed alongside all other languages by government agencies.

## **The Board work programme – future focus**

### *Deaf Youth*

31. Language planning principles include the need for access to and the inter-generational transmission of NZSL. The needs of the Deaf Youth population are a high priority for the Board, with many projects funded to support Deaf spaces where children can use NZSL alongside adults.
32. The Board is aware that the needs of Deaf youth need to be considered in the context of improved access to education at their local school with decreased opportunities to learn alongside other Deaf peers and adults. Research into the needs of Deaf youth will provide evidence of effective programmes to support the acquisition and access to NZSL for this population.

### *NZSL Act 2006: a time for review*

33. The Human Rights Commission report, *A new Era in the Right to Sign*, 2013, highlighted a range of barriers faced by NZSL users after the NZSL Act 2006 (the Act) was implemented. Since the report was published, several changes have been initiated, including the First Signs service and NZSL @ School programme, the establishment of the NZSL Board, and release of the NZSL Strategy (2018-2023).
34. A review of the Act would provide an opportunity to consider the principles that guide the NZSL Act 2006 against the NZSL Strategy priorities (2018-2023). It could strengthen thinking beyond recognising the use of NZSL only as a human right of the Deaf community, towards embracing NZSL as an official language for all New Zealanders.

35. A review of the Act would also create an opportunity to review other aspects, such as the specification of NZSL provisions in education, as it currently does for the health and justice sectors.



## Annex A: Summary information for successful applications to contestable Round 6 of the NZSL Fund

Ref	Organisation	Project Name	Funding requested (excl GST)	Funding recommended (excl GST)
1	Deaf Action	Our Nation, Our Identity	\$19,500	\$19,500
2	Otago Deaf Society	NZSL Community access	\$28,270	\$12,500
3	Learn NZSL with Eddie	Far North outreach	\$11,000	\$11,000
4	Deaf Society of Canterbury	Deaf Club Network	\$42,000	\$42,000
5	Julie-Anne Bode	Southland Silent Camp	\$15,871	\$15,871
6	Waikato University	Equal Voices	\$19,900	\$19,900
7	Deaf Society of Canterbury	Vibrant Signing community	\$44,144	\$12,500
8	Deaf Sports NZ	Sports Summit	\$23,500	\$11,750
9	Auckland Deaf Society	FYD programme	\$91,517	\$50,000
10	Auckland University of Technology	NZSL in pharmacy settings	\$19,900	\$19,900
11	Kelston Deaf Education Centre	High School Summer Camp 2021	\$72,800	\$36,400
12	Otago Association of Deaf Children	Strong Foundation for Deaf Children	\$67,274	\$40,000
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$455,676</b>	<b>\$291,321</b>