

4 May 2023

Kia ora,

My name is Rhian, and I'm the NZSL Board chair, I am making this statement on behalf of the NZSL Board.

First, we want to recognise your concerns/disappointment about the Board's decision to continue with using the National Accreditation Authority of Translators and Interpreters (NAATI) to assess the skills of NZSL interpreters. Continuing with NAATI does mean that people could go to a general certificate in interpreting course, and then (if they have enough NZSL skills), they can ask to be assessed by NAATI, without needing to complete a sign language interpreting-specific course (like the Auckland University of Technology (AUT) 3-year degree in NZSL/English interpreting).

This work is about making sure the Deaf community has access to good quality interpreting. We want to have a system that gives us all the confidence that when interpreters are booked for any job, they have the skills to do that job well. We want a system that is fair, and the same all over New Zealand.

It was not our intention to cause this distress in the community.

The Board became aware of this requirement of NAATI's (that generic interpreting qualifications be accepted by NAATI) at our March 2023 meeting and had a robust discussion. We are well aware of the fact that at end of 2021, we assured the Sign Language Interpreters Association of New Zealand (SLIANZ) that we agreed unqualified communicators should not be able to be tested for NAATI accreditation.

We decided to proceed with using NAATI based on the information that we have already shared with in our initial statement released on 1 May 2023, including information that is on our website - ultimately that we believe what NAATI can offer us has multiple benefits.

One important point I want to be clear on, the NZSL Board does share the same concerns regarding generic-qualified interpreters who would lack the depth of ethical training, Deaf community immersion, and understanding of Deaf culture and so on (which all of is covered in the current SLI degree programme at AUT).

To resolve that concern of ours (and yours), we intend to work with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) to set up guidelines that match interpreter skills with interpreting jobs in different settings, for example courts and medical settings. The Board would be able to monitor that all government departments and all interpreter booking agencies would have to follow these guidelines

At our March 2023 meeting, we made our decision as we believe that setting guidelines would reduce the risk of lower-qualified and skilled interpreters working in high-risk settings and that the standard for most NZSL interpreting work would be based on sign language interpreting qualifications.

However, with the community's current passionate discussion about our decision, we have decided to put on hold any work regarding NAATI, to allow us to collect further information and have another look at our decision, based on everyone having good information and feedback.

Another important thing I want to add is that whatever system we choose, the NZSL Board will monitor the impact of that system, and will stop any process that creates a risk for the Deaf and NZSL community.

You may remember that I said in our initial statement on 1 May 2023, we would set up online meetings for the Board to meet with the Deaf community, and with the NZSL interpreter community.

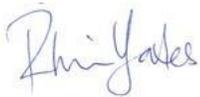
We still intend to go ahead with those online meetings, and as soon as we can, we will announce meeting dates/times. We look forward to meeting with you online to discuss this topic further. We will continue to release information on this topic prior to these online meetings, on ODI's website.

Going forward, we will be looking at how we can improve our information-sharing with the community and our stakeholders.

We continue to welcome any questions on here or by emailing us at nz_sign_language@whaikaha.govt.nz

In the meantime, with NZSL Week happening 8-14 May, let's celebrate NZSL! We look forward to seeing the various ways NZSL is celebrated and embraced across the country.

Thank you



Rhian Yates
Chair, NZSL Board