



# Guidelines for the Employment of Sign Language Interpreters in Educational Settings

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## About ASLIA

The Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association (ASLIA) is a non-profit body and is the national peak organisation representing the needs and interests of Auslan/English interpreters and Deaf (Relay) Interpreters in Australia. The Association is comprised of a national Executive Committee, a Representative Council and branches in most states/territories.

ASLIA's vision is to seek to lead and promote best practice in sign language interpreting across Australia. To achieve this, ASLIA provides policies and a platform for the views of sign language interpreters throughout the nation on a variety of issues, including: training, on-going professional development, recruitment, working conditions, remuneration, and the provision of services within the sign language interpreting sector. In addition, ASLIA is a member the World Association of Sign Language Interpreters (WASLI) and one key aspect of this membership is to support sign language interpreting practitioners in developing countries within the Australasian & Oceania region.

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## Preamble

The Commonwealth [\*Disability Education Standards 2005\*](#) "...give students with disabilities rights in relation to specialised services needed for them to participate in the educational activities for which they are enrolled (including) specialist expertise (or) personal educational support...without which some students with disabilities would not be able to access education and training."

These Guidelines apply to all educational settings covered by the Commonwealth *Disability Education Standards*, including:

- government and non-government schools
- universities
- TAFE and other RTOs
- not-for-profit providers.

Under Section 22 of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, it is "...unlawful for an [educational authority](#) to [discriminate](#) against a student on the ground of the student's [disability...](#)by denying the student access, or limiting the student's access, to any benefit provided by the [educational authority](#)".

In the case of deaf students for whom a signed language (such as Auslan<sup>1</sup>) or sign system (such as Signed English) is a primary or most reliable form of communication, an interpreter is one way in which educational authorities can fulfill their legal obligation to provide access to both the curriculum and to other benefits provided by the educational authority (such as extracurricular activities).

The United Nations *Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, to which Australia is a signatory, states that signatories must:

- "provide forms of live assistance and intermediaries, including... professional sign language interpreters, to facilitate accessibility to ...facilities open to the public [including schools]<sup>2</sup>;
- recognise and promote the use of sign languages<sup>3</sup>;
- (ensure that) persons with disabilities receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education"<sup>4</sup>.

The peak body representing Deaf people, the World Federation of the Deaf, which has consultative status in the United Nations, has called upon governments to "Ensure that Deaf learners who may be placed in mainstream educational settings have access to the services of educated, trained and qualified sign language interpreters...and full participation in both the educative and co-curricular processes."<sup>5</sup>

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1 Australian Sign Language, the language of the Australian Deaf community

2 <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=269>

3 <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=281>

4 <http://www.un.org/disabilities/default.asp?id=284>

5 <http://www.wfdeaf.org/policies/education-rights-for-deaf-children>

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In the case of Australia, “qualified sign language interpreters” are those who are accredited by NAATI<sup>6</sup>.

Deaf students who cannot access an interpreter with NAATI accreditation are at risk of not gaining full access to either the curriculum or to norms of social interaction. Further, unlike spoken language communities, where children from a non-English-speaking background are likely to be exposed to their primary language in the home and in their wider social circle, most deaf children are likely to be reliant upon a small number of language models, of which the interpreter is likely to be the strongest or only native-like language model. As such, it is imperative for language development and ensuring optimal access and participation in educational contexts that those individuals functioning as interpreters must be appropriately skilled. At present, the industry standard and only measure of skill level is NAATI accreditation.

ASLIA therefore offers this document as a guideline for employers of interpreters in educational settings, and looks forward to working with employers, Government and representative unions in order to implement best practice for the recruitment and ongoing employment of educational interpreters.

### What is an interpreter?

An interpreter receives a message in one language and delivers it in another, usually having to produce the interpreted message within a very short period after receiving the message in the first language. This requires a high degree of linguistic, cognitive and technical skills. An interpreter may interpret in simultaneous<sup>7</sup> or consecutive<sup>8</sup> mode.

As with interpreters of spoken languages, Auslan/English interpreters are accredited by the [National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters](#) (NAATI). Auslan/English interpreters are accredited by NAATI at either the Paraprofessional level (formerly known as Level II) or the Interpreter, which is also referred to as the Professional level (formerly known as Level III).

Within the sign language field, individuals who receive a message in Signed English (rather than Auslan) and deliver it in spoken English, or vice versa, are known as transliterators. Educational transliteration shares many of the characteristics and requirements of Auslan/English educational interpreting, and educational transliterators should therefore possess similar qualifications and qualities as that required by educational interpreters. However, it should be noted that NAATI does not provide accreditation for Signed English transliterators (as working between Signed English and spoken English is not working between two languages, as interpreters do). This represents a particular challenge in guaranteeing quality because there is no national standard and no way of assessing those who work in this capacity. As such, this should be of concern for education providers who are required by the *Disability Education Standards* to ensure “appropriately trained” support staff are available for students with disabilities<sup>9</sup>. Decisions on the level of competency for Signed English transliterators are arbitrary and inconsistent, resulting in unpredictable, and often sub-standard, language role models and access to education.

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6 National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters

7 A mode of interpreting where the message is interpreted into the target language while the source language message is being spoken/signed (usually with a delay of no more than a few seconds)

8 A mode of interpreting where the interpreter waits for the speaker to finish an utterance of reasonable length (given the interpreter’s memory and or note taking skills) before they translate it.

(<http://www.ausit.org/eng/showpage.php3?id=851>)

9 Section 7.3(d)

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For the purposes of this document, the term 'interpreter' encompasses both interpreters and transliterators.

### What does an educational interpreter do?

An educational interpreter is required to:

- Interpret from English into a signed language (e.g. Auslan) or sign system (e.g. Signed English)
- Interpret from a signed language or sign system into spoken English
- Adhere to the ASLIA [Code of Ethics](#) – the industry standard for professional and ethical conduct for sign language interpreters in Australia.

These obligations exist during classes, excursions, presentations and performances from visitors or guest speakers, meetings and counselling sessions, institution events, and extracurricular or any other institution activities. Accurate, competent and ethical interpretation ensures that deaf students are able to participate fully in education and that education providers are able to accurately evaluate student performance.

*Note:* While job titles vary in different educational settings and jurisdictions across the country, the above obligations extend to any individual working with a deaf person in an educational setting, where they are required to interpret between a signed and spoken language in the regular course of their duties.

An educational interpreter *may* also be required to:

- Be a primary (or only) language model for a deaf student;
- Work with the classroom teacher/lecturer, teacher of the deaf or teacher/consultant to promote inclusion of the deaf student/s;
- Provide feedback and guidance to ensure service provision best meets the needs of deaf student/s; and
- In collaboration with a teacher of the deaf where possible, teach signing and/or provide Deafness Awareness Training to staff and/or other students.

### Qualities and qualifications

An educational interpreter must:

- Be extremely fluent in both Auslan (or other language/system used by the student) and spoken (and written) English
- Be skilled in interpreting between the two languages
- Be able to demonstrate a good understanding of pedagogical theory and practice, including education of the deaf

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- Be able to demonstrate a good understanding of, and respect for, both Deaf and mainstream cultures
- Be able to demonstrate knowledge of child and language development (if working in preschool-Year 12 settings)
- Be able to demonstrate knowledge of specific subject areas
- Be a good team worker
- Possess a strong sense of professional ethics and boundaries
- Be aware of the “illusion of inclusion” that can occur during mediated learning<sup>10</sup> and strategies to mitigate this

### Guidelines for the hiring of interpreters in K-12 and beyond

The Federal Government<sup>11</sup> and all State Governments<sup>12</sup> have policies in place stating that individuals who have “difficulty communicating in English” must be provided with “professional interpreters” and in most cases specifying the use of NAATI-accredited interpreters. In the case of State Governments, these policies apply to all Government agencies, including Education Departments. None of these State Government policies excludes children or students, and clearly, deaf students who communicate using Auslan have “difficulty communicating in English”. It is therefore clear that State Education Departments are responsible for ensuring that individuals, who perform interpreting tasks in public schools, including those who work with deaf students, must be professional interpreters.

ASLIA supports the position of NAATI, which states that “(The level of) Professional Interpreter [formerly Level 3] represents the minimum level of competence for professional interpreting” and that Paraprofessional Interpreter level [formerly Level 2] “represents a level of competence in interpreting for the purpose of general conversations, generally in the form of non-specialist dialogues (including) interpreting in general conversations, interpreting in situations where specialised terminology or more sophisticated conceptual information is not required (and) interpreting in situations where a depth of linguistic ability is not required<sup>13</sup>”. Educational interpreting requires specialist knowledge, terminology and sophisticated conceptual information.

Thus, ASLIA asserts that:

- Government departments and agencies, including Education Departments, as well as schools and early childhood programs in the independent/private sector, and in the post-

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<sup>10</sup> For further information and references, see

<http://www.nmsd.k12.nm.us/publications/documents/IllusionofInclusion-RealitiesandConsequences.pdf>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.ombudsman.gov.au/docs/fact-sheets/onlineFactSheet4-interpreters.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.multicultural.qld.gov.au/services-resources/translating-interpreting-services/services.html>

[http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/services/language\\_services/national\\_interpreter\\_symbol/policy](http://www.crc.nsw.gov.au/services/language_services/national_interpreter_symbol/policy)

<http://www.multicultural.vic.gov.au/images/stories/pdf/2383%20vmc%20interpreter%20manual%20web.pdf>

[http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/resources/publications/Languages/language\\_services\\_2008.pdf](http://www.omi.wa.gov.au/resources/publications/Languages/language_services_2008.pdf)

[http://www.workcover.sa.gov.au/custom/files/2283\\_CC\\_Interpreting\\_and\\_translating\\_policy\\_201010221516990.pdf](http://www.workcover.sa.gov.au/custom/files/2283_CC_Interpreting_and_translating_policy_201010221516990.pdf)

<http://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/divisions/cdd/multitas/interpreter>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.naati.com.au/at-accreditation.html>

## **ASLIA Guidelines for the Employment of Sign Language Interpreters in Educational Settings**

secondary sector, should ultimately aim to employ (whether full-time, part-time or on a casual or consultancy basis) only those interpreters accredited at the Professional level

- All educational interpreters, including interpreters currently working in schools, should ultimately aim to attain NAATI Professional interpreter accreditation

However, ASLIA also understands that there are currently a number of barriers to this policy being implemented, including:

- The lack of Professionally (and indeed Paraprofessionally) accredited interpreters throughout most states and territories of Australia
- The fact that many interpreters working in schools are not designated as 'interpreters', although their job description – or actual duties – includes interpreting
- The cost of employing Professional interpreters, including concerns that casual interpreting pay rates may be higher than those received by a classroom teacher.

ASLIA therefore makes the following recommendations:

1. All educational interpreters must be NAATI-accredited at Professional interpreter level. Other qualifications, particularly in interpreting (such as a Master of Translation and Interpreting), education (such as a Bachelor of Education) or specific subject areas are also likely to be useful, and should be taken into consideration when employing an educational interpreter.
2. ASLIA recognises that there is a shortage of interpreters qualified at Professional interpreter level. Therefore, ASLIA recommends that, where no suitably qualified Professional interpreters are available, a Paraprofessional interpreter may be employed. Any Paraprofessional interpreter employed as an educational interpreter should be required to be working towards Professional accreditation. This may take the form of:
  - Current enrolment in a course approved by NAATI, the successful completion of which will result in Professional accreditation
  - Participation in professional development opportunities, with a view to sit a NAATI Professional level test within three years of commencing employment as an educational interpreter.
3. ASLIA recognises that there is also a shortage of interpreters qualified at Paraprofessional interpreter level. However, ASLIA cannot condone the employment of unaccredited individuals to perform interpreting work in educational settings, given the likely impact of this on the education and linguistic development of the deaf student.

ASLIA therefore urges employers of educational interpreters to work closely with ASLIA as well as with training organisations (such as TAFE<sup>14</sup>, the Deaf Education Network<sup>15</sup>,

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14 TAFE provides Auslan training and pathways to Paraprofessional accreditation in most states

15 DEN provides Auslan training in Sydney (but does not provide interpreter training)

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NABS<sup>16</sup>, La Trobe University<sup>17</sup> and Macquarie University<sup>18</sup>) to increase the numbers of accredited interpreters available.

Employers of school interpreters are also likely to find that interpreters who are currently working outside the education sector, or who have chosen to leave the field of interpreting for better paid work elsewhere, will choose to return to the education sector once there are improved standards and working conditions, including higher pay rates equal to that of accredited interpreters in other sectors.

4. All educational interpreters, regardless of level of accreditation, should engage in professional development opportunities. Ideally, these will be provided by the place of employment as well as by professional associations such as ASLIA.
5. Educational interpreters should be subject to, and benefit from, ongoing performance appraisal and review. Performance appraisal of interpreting skills must be undertaken by a suitably qualified person or team, with NAATI Professional accreditation as a minimum qualification. In circumstances where such a person is unavailable within the educational institution, then the educational institution is responsible for outsourcing or otherwise providing access to an appropriate appraisal.
6. Interpreting is a high-skill task, and pay rates must reflect the skills, knowledge, qualifications and responsibilities of the position, as well as the demand for interpreting services. Educational interpreters must be paid at rates consistent with that enjoyed by interpreters in other sectors. Pay rates should be commensurate with:
  - Accreditation level
  - Other qualifications
  - Experience
7. Employers of educational interpreters must provide safe working conditions for interpreters. See ASLIA's Occupational Health and Safety policy<sup>19</sup> for further information.
8. As with all NAATI-accredited interpreters, educational interpreters must adhere to ASLIA's Code of Ethics.

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16 NABS, the National Auslan Booking Service, provides a pathway to Paraprofessional accreditation nationwide

17 La Trobe may soon provide an undergraduate degree leading to Paraprofessional accreditation

18 Macquarie University provides postgraduate degrees leading to Professional accreditation

19 [http://aslia.com.au/images/stories/ASLIA\\_Documents/Policies\\_Procedures/ASLIA\\_OHS\\_Policy.pdf](http://aslia.com.au/images/stories/ASLIA_Documents/Policies_Procedures/ASLIA_OHS_Policy.pdf)



## Definitions

1. For the purposes of this document, an 'educational interpreter' is any person whose job duties substantially (that is, for more than 20% of their time employed) include:
  - interpreting
  - transliterating
  - in any way converting spoken or written English into Auslan or another signed language or sign system, or vice versa
2. This may include individuals employed as:
  - Interpreters
  - Transliterators
  - Teachers of the Deaf
  - Teacher aides
  - Teacher aides (special)
  - Teaching assistants
  - Any other designation or job description.
3. An educational interpreter may be employed directly by an individual educational institution or Education Department, or employed indirectly via an interpreting agency.
4. An educational interpreter may be employed on a permanent or contract basis, and as a full-time, part-time, casual or contract employee.