



NZSL Business Landscape

New Zealand
(2026 Snapshot)



Strategic Funding Proposal for Strengthening Deaf-Led NZSL Businesses in Aotearoa New Zealand

An overview of NZSL businesses, workforce, and development needs across Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Acknowledgements

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On behalf of:

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Prepared for:

NZSL Board, NZSLTA, supporting funders, and stakeholders

2 June 2026

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1. Executive Summary

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is one of the official languages of Aotearoa New Zealand and the natural language of the Deaf community. According to Stats NZ, approximately 24,000 people in New Zealand.

Protecting, strengthening, and sustaining NZSL requires coordinated investment in **Deaf-led NZSL businesses, workforce development, student learning opportunities, and long-term national support systems.**

Across Aotearoa New Zealand, Deaf-led NZSL businesses play a critical role in delivering NZSL courses, training, and related services, while also supporting Deaf leadership, employment opportunities, and increased public use of NZSL within communities.

These businesses provide NZSL learning opportunities for a wide range of learners including students, families of Deaf children, professionals, workplaces, government agencies, and members of the public who wish to communicate effectively with Deaf people.

However, several NZSL businesses currently operate with **limited infrastructure, minimal operational support, and increasing demand for services, placing significant pressure on their ability to sustain and expand delivery.**

Many Deaf business owners manage multiple responsibilities simultaneously, including business operations, administration, teaching, mentoring, and community leadership roles.

These pressures create significant challenges for the long-term sustainability and growth of NZSL services nationwide.

At the same time, demand for NZSL learning continues to increase across the country. This growing demand highlights the need for:

- greater access to NZSL courses nationwide
- workforce development and professional support for NZSL tutors
- sustainable investment in Deaf-led NZSL businesses
- improved student learning pathways and NZSL immersion opportunities
- increased numbers of NZSL interpreters including Deaf interpreters
- greater accessibility and public visibility of NZSL
- stronger national coordination and shared support systems across the NZSL sector

This report provides an overview of the current NZSL business sector and identifies key gaps, barriers, and development priorities affecting NZSL businesses, tutors, and students.

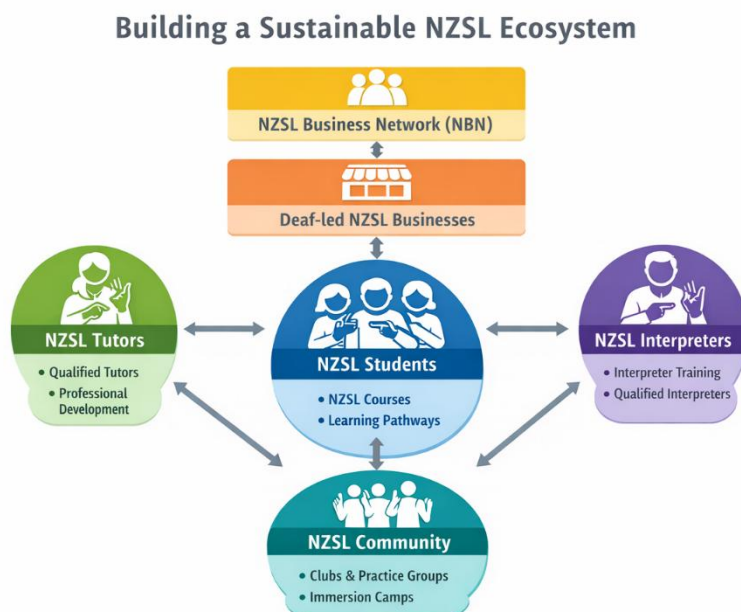
The report also outlines **strategic recommendations** aimed at strengthening the sustainability, capability, and long-term growth of the NZSL sector.

Key priority areas identified within this report include:

- strengthening NZSL business operations and infrastructure
- improving access to financial, operational, and marketing support
- nationally coordinated professional development, mentoring, and sustainable training pathways for the NZSL teaching workforce
- expanded NZSL learning opportunities for students nationwide
- development of NZSL hubs, community practice groups, and immersion opportunities
- improved sector-wide data collection and future planning

The **NZSL Business Network (NBN)**, a collective of Deaf-led NZSL businesses and leaders, has developed this proposal to seek partnership and funding support from the NZSL Board, New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association (NZSLTA), government agencies, community organisations, philanthropic funders, and other stakeholders.

Through **strategic collaboration and targeted investment**, this proposal aims to strengthen the national NZSL ecosystem, support **long-term sustainability and growth of NZSL services**, learning opportunities, and Deaf leadership across Aotearoa New Zealand.



2. Introduction

Background of New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL)

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is one of the official languages of Aotearoa New Zealand and the natural language of the Deaf community. NZSL is a unique visual language with its own grammar, structure, and cultural identity.

The New Zealand Sign Language Act 2006 formally recognises NZSL as an official language of New Zealand. This recognition highlights the importance of supporting and promoting NZSL across education, workplaces, public services, and community settings.

Demand for NZSL learning and accessibility continues to grow nationwide. At the same time, NZSL businesses, tutors, and community providers operate with limited infrastructure, workforce capacity, and operational support systems. These challenges are reflected in the current list of NZSL businesses operating across Aotearoa New Zealand (refer to page 11).

Many Deaf children and families also continue to experience limited access to NZSL within their local communities, particularly in regional areas where services and learning opportunities may be limited.

NZSL in Education

According to the *New Zealand Sign Language Strategy 2026 - 2036*, Deaf children require opportunities to learn and use NZSL naturally with other NZSL peers (New Zealand Sign Language Board, 2025).



There is a strong need for NZSL to be recognised and delivered within schools across New Zealand, ensuring that learners have opportunities to access and learn NZSL. Expanding access to NZSL within education supports inclusive learning environments, equitable communication access, and greater awareness of NZSL and Deaf culture within schools.

Increased opportunities to learn NZSL would also strengthen communication and connection between Deaf and hearing communities.

This is especially critical for:

- **Deaf children** - Early and sustained access to NZSL is essential to support language development, equitable access to the curriculum and positive learning outcomes.
- **Whānau** - Whānau require the skills and support to communicate effectively with Deaf family members, strengthening connection, wellbeing, and inclusion.
- **Hearing students and school communities** - Learning NZSL within schools helps strengthen awareness of Deaf culture, improve communication and inclusion, and support greater connection between Deaf and hearing communities.
- **Deaf adults** - Ongoing NZSL learning environments help maintain language use, strengthen Deaf identity and Deaf community connection, and support participation in society.

This also aligns with the *World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) Position Statement on the Right to Sign Language in Education*.

Expanding access to NZSL learning supports greater participation in employment, education, and community life, while contributing to improved long-term social and economic outcome.

Accessibility in NZSL

Deaf people in New Zealand deserve to be treated as first-class citizens, with full access to NZSL in public life. Deaf people are often excluded from many areas of society due to the lack of accessible communication and NZSL access. The Deaf Way Report (Deaf Aotearoa, 2010) identifies significant gaps in access for Deaf people across services in New Zealand.

This includes access in:

- organisations and workplaces
- events and public services
- facilities and entertainment
- social media and digital platforms
- community spaces and environments



These spaces must allow Deaf people including hard of hearing people to communicate freely in NZSL.

Supporting access to NZSL also aligns with New Zealand’s commitments under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), which recognises the importance of sign languages, accessibility, participation, and equitable access to public life for Deaf people.

Supporting Deaf-led NZSL businesses contributes to strengthening NZSL access, employment opportunities, cultural sustainability, and community participation in alignment with the principles of the UNCRPD.

The Critical Role of NZSL Services

The continued growth and sustainability of NZSL depends on accessible learning opportunities, qualified tutors, interpreters, and community-led NZSL services across the country.



As demand for NZSL learning and accessibility continues to increase, ***NZSL businesses alone cannot meet this growing national need without stronger coordination, workforce development, and long-term support systems.***

Currently, the NZSL sector and Deaf communities in New Zealand continue to experience systemic challenges, including:

- limited availability of NZSL courses
- shortages of qualified NZSL tutors and teachers
- limited sustainable training and workforce pathways
- a limited supply of NZSL interpreters
- declining vitality of NZSL as a living language

NZSL Tutors: The Front Line

NZSL tutors are key professionals responsible for delivering NZSL education across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Many NZSL tutors have completed formal training through the **Certificate in Deaf Studies and Teaching NZSL at Victoria University of Wellington**, which provides foundational knowledge in NZSL teaching, Deaf culture, and language development.



In addition, NZSL tutors are typically registered with the New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association (NZSLTA), which supports professional standards, ongoing development, and recognition within the sector.

NZSL tutors are often members of the Deaf community and bring lived experience, cultural knowledge, and language expertise into their teaching. Their role is critical not only in teaching NZSL as a language, but also in supporting greater understanding of Deaf culture and improving accessibility for Deaf people across society.

NZSL tutors play a critical frontline role in strengthening the language. They teach people who go on to create positive change for Deaf communities across Aotearoa - including educators, interpreters, public servants, businesses, and community leaders.

To sustain employment of NZSL tutors into the future, registered NZSL tutors must be supported, valued, and fairly paid, with opportunities to teach NZSL full-time where possible.

Aim for this Proposal:

To write a proposal for the government, organisations, private businesses, community groups, funders, and other stakeholders to provide support to a group of NBN to organise NZSL learning opportunities nationwide, as well support the long-term sustainability and development of the NZSL teaching workforce across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Information included in this proposal:

1. A list of NZSL businesses operating across Aotearoa New Zealand
2. The scope of services provided by participating NZSL businesses
3. Key gaps, barriers, and development needs relating to:
 1. NZSL businesses operations
 2. the NZSL teaching workforce
 3. NZSL students and learners
4. Evidence, sector insights, and community experiences supporting the identified needs
5. Strategic recommendations and priority areas for future investment and development
6. Draft budget information (available on request)
7. Supporting appendices and references

3. NZSL Business Network



Who We Are

The NZSL Business Network (NBN) is a collective of Deaf-led NZSL businesses and leaders working together to build and strengthen sustainable, Deaf-led business models that support the growth and long-term sustainability of NZSL.

As part of our strategy, we hold regular and purposeful Zoom meetings four to five times each year, creating space for NZSL business leaders including sole traders to connect, collaborate, and support one another.

Our objectives

As a Deaf-led network, our approach is grounded in NZSL, Deaf culture, and the principle of Deaf Gain - recognising the strengths and contributions of Deaf people. Through this network, we aim to:

- **Connect Deaf-led NZSL business leaders** and engage in **natural, NZSL-first communication environments**.
- **Share knowledge, lived experience, and cultural understanding**, recognising the value of **Deaf Gain** - the unique perspectives, strengths, and contributions that Deaf people bring to business, language, and society.
- **Build confidence and capability in operating sustainable NZSL enterprises** grounded in Deaf leadership, NZSL, and community values.
- **Support and uplift one another as a Deaf business community**, fostering collaboration, collective growth, and shared success.
- **Strengthen relationships and collaboration across the network**, including appropriate sharing of student pathways and referrals.
- **Work collectively to address sector challenges**, promote NZSL as a living language, and advance Deaf-led development across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our Vision

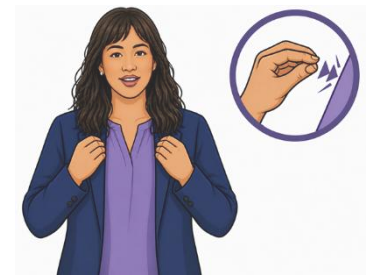
*The wellbeing and future of New Zealand Sign Language
must be protected, strengthened, and sustained.*

Kotahi, he oranga nui o te reo rotarota o Aotearoa.

4. Overview of the NZSL Business Sector

List of NZSL Businesses in NZ

The following section provides an overview of NZSL businesses currently operating in New Zealand. As of 20 March 2026, there are approximately ten NZSL businesses delivering NZSL education and related services across the country.



Business name	Director/owner	Website	Year founded
Deaf Way	Trustees (x3)	www.deafway.co.nz info@deafway.co.nz	November 2024
Merge NZ Ltd	Victoria Lessing	www.mergenz.co.nz info@mergenz.co.nz	February 2017
NZ Hands Alive	Pixie Neame	www.nzhandsalive.co.nz nzhandsalive@gmail.com	November 2002
NZSL Club Trust	Trustees (x4)	www.nzsl.club kiaora@nzsl.club	December 2019 Renamed as NZSL Club Trust October 2025
Signora	Rachel Walker	https://signora.co.nz	September 2014
Sign West	Monica Leach	www.signwest.co.nz	June 2024
USign	Kelly Quirke	https://usign.co.nz	February 2017
We Signz	Sejin Bae	www.instagram.com/wesignz	February 2025

Note: This report includes NZSL businesses that have consented to share their information. Some businesses have chosen not to participate due to privacy considerations.

Over the years, few NZSL businesses for example NZSL4U and other small businesses have also been established but later closed or become inactive due to factors such as limited strategic planning, lack of funding, or other operational challenges.

This highlights the importance of sustainable support structures to ensure the long-term viability of NZSL businesses in New Zealand.

Scope of Services Provided by NZSL Businesses

NZSL Club Trust



Entity: Charity (Fundraising/Grants)
Audience: Communities, Māori communities, seniors, and businesses
Area: Northland and other regions to try to fill the gaps where possible.

Personnel:

- Trustees: (x4), Fred Tito (Chairperson)
- Administrator/Manager: Kim Robinson
- Specialist Admin Support: Hanariki Mā

Tutors:

- Kim Robinson (NZSL tutor)
- Eddie Hokianga (Māori Ringa Tohu Reo classes in Te Reo Māori & NZSL)
- Alana Best (Substitute for Kim Robinson)

Services Offered:

- Onsite group courses
- Groups and individual private bookings
- Deaf Culture workshops

NZSL Clubs host:

- Northland - 1 NZSL Club (Whangarei) Practice Cafe 2nd Saturday of the month

Active students: 100+ (current classes)
Total on database: 400+ (previous classes since 2019).

Number of courses p/a: 16 courses
Number of courses so far: 48 courses

Merge NZ



Entity: Limited company. Social enterprise model.
Audience: Communities, education, businesses and government
Area: Nationwide

Personnel:

- Team of 5 admin contractors (0.6 FTE) - 77% Deaf and 23% hearing
- Team of 30 tutors/teachers (contract basis) - 100% Deaf

Services Offered:

- Onsite group courses in local cities/towns
- MySign NZSL online courses
- Covering from Level 1a to Level 3d (full 3 years course)
- NZSL taster classes
- Deaf Culture workshops (both online/onsite)
- NZSL training for Businesses/Organisations
- NZSL specialised NZSL courses:
 - *NZSL for Health*
 - *NZSL for Emergency*
 - *NZSL for Teachers*
 - *NZSL for Kiwi Kids/NZSL for Youth*
 - *NZSL for Water Safety*
 - *NZSL for Customer Service*
- Groups and individual 1-to-1 personalised lessons
- NZSL Curriculum development (on demand)
- NZSL Tutors trainings (approx. 5 - 6 times a year)

NZSL Club host:

3 active locations (Waikato, Otago, and Southland)

Active students: 2,000 (online and onsite)
Total database: 12,000+ (since 2017)

Number of courses p/a: 200 courses p/a
Number of courses so far: 1,100 courses

USign



Entity: Sole Trader
Audience: Communities, education, and businesses
Area: Waikato (Cambridge)

Personnel:

- Owner/teacher: Kelly Quirke

Services Offered:

- Online NZSL courses
- Onsite group courses
- Covering from Level 1a to Level 3d (full 3 years course)
- Offering onsite Level 4 course (new)
- 1-to-1 personalised lessons

Number of courses p/a: 21 courses p/a

Number of courses so far: 213 courses

NZ Hands Alive



Entity: Sole Trader
Audience: Communities and businesses
Area: Rotorua (can travel nationwide on request)

Personnel:

- Owner/teacher: Pixie Neame

Services Offered:

- Onsite group courses (Level 1 - Level 3)
- Online courses
- Deaf Awareness workshops
- 1-to-1 personalised lessons

Number of courses p/a: 10 courses

Number of courses so far: 240 courses

SignWest



Entity: Sole trader
Audience: Communities and disability organisations
Area: West Auckland (Titirangi area)
Personnel:

- Owner/teacher: Monica Leach

Services Offered:

- Onsite group courses (Level 1 & 2)
- NZSL taster and crash courses
- NZSL School visits
- Deaf culture workshops
- Private or small-group lessons
- Community courses in West Auckland

Number of courses p/a: 5 courses

Number of courses so far: 12 courses

Signora

Signora

Entity: Sole Trader
Audience: Communities, education, and businesses.
Area: Auckland
Personnel:

- Owner/teacher: Rachel Walker

Services Offered:

- Online NZSL courses (Level 1 – 3)
- Onsite group courses
- Deaf Awareness workshops
- NZSL taster classes
- 1-to-1 personalised lessons

Number of courses p/a: 4 courses

Number of courses so far: 11 courses

Deaf Way



Entity: Charitable Trust
Audience: Deaf Awareness and NZSL education.
Area: Online
Personnel:

- Trustees: David Brown, Jaime Brown and Kerry Hargood

Services Offered:

- Free online self paced training for Deaf and hearing participants
- Free webinar trainings on different topics
- NZSL resources and information
- Free training for organisations or industries

Number of courses p/a: 11 courses

Number of courses so far: N/A

WeSignz



Entity: Sole Trader
Audience: Communities (libraries/day care centres)
Area: Auckland
Personnel:

- Owner/tutor: Sejin Bae

Services offer:

- Onsite group courses
- School visits
- 1-to-1 personalised lessons

Overview of NZSL Sector Data

The following summary provides a snapshot of available information relating to NZSL businesses, tutors, and learners in New Zealand.

Category	Data
Total number of NZSL businesses	10 organisations
Total number of NZSL active tutors	Approximately 100 tutors
Total number of NZSL active students:	Data currently unavailable
Total number of NZSL students from past: (historical)	Data currently unavailable

Note: Accurate national data on NZSL student numbers is currently not centrally collected or coordinated. This highlights the need for improved data collection and monitoring systems across NZSL service providers.

National NZSL Community Statistics

According to Stats NZ, approximately 24,000 people in New Zealand are able to use NZSL, including both Deaf and hearing users.

NZSL is used across a wide range of settings, including education, workplaces, public services, families, and community environments.

Demand for NZSL learning and accessibility has continued to increase across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Despite this, nationally coordinated data relating to:

- NZSL learners
- workforce numbers
- tutor/teacher capacity
- regional access to NZSL courses

remains limited.



This highlights the importance of improving national data collection and monitoring systems to support future planning, investment, and workforce development across the NZSL sector.

Authentic NZSL Teaching Providers

There have been increasing instances of hearing individuals attempting to establish NZSL courses or businesses, often without appropriate qualifications or sufficient NZSL proficiency.

Many of these individuals may have only basic NZSL skills or a personal connection to the Deaf community, such as having a Deaf family member.

Members of the Deaf community, including qualified NZSL teachers/tutors and NZSL interpreters, have raised concerns about the teaching experience, language proficiency, and professional qualifications of some of these course providers.

Concerns have been formally raised with the NZSLTA, with emails submitted requesting investigation and appropriate action where necessary.

This situation highlights the importance of maintaining quality standards, protecting the integrity of NZSL teaching, and ensuring that NZSL teaching services is led by appropriately qualified tutors with strong connections to the Deaf community.

A similar principle can be observed within **Te Reo Māori communities**, where there is a strong emphasis on ensuring that language teaching is led by individuals with appropriate cultural authority, lived experience, and a deep connection to the language.

This reflects the importance of protecting language integrity and avoiding cultural misrepresentation.

In the same way, NZSL is a language of the Deaf community, and its teaching must be led by those who are appropriately qualified and culturally connected.

Ensuring that NZSL teaching services remains Deaf-led helps maintain the authenticity, cultural integrity, and quality of the language as it is shared with wider communities.

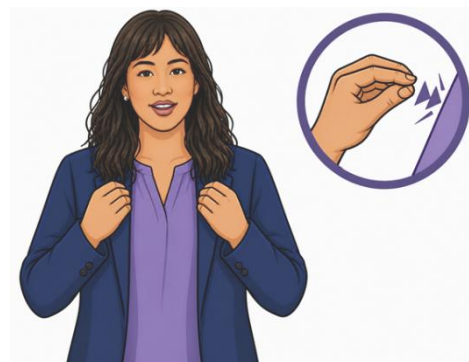
Without clear standards and support for Deaf-led NZSL teaching service, the quality and cultural integrity of NZSL teaching across New Zealand may be compromised.

The World Federation of the Deaf (WFD) recognises the importance of **Deaf-led sign language teaching and states that Deaf people should be given opportunities to teach their own national sign languages** (WFD, 2023). This reflects the importance of protecting language integrity, cultural knowledge, and authentic NZSL learning environments led by appropriately qualified and culturally connected tutors.

5. The Need for Support

A. Business Operational Needs

The NZSL Business Network (NBN) has identified a range of key challenges affecting the sustainability and growth of Deaf-led NZSL businesses, the development of NZSL tutors, and access to NZSL learning for students across New Zealand.



While NZSL businesses play a vital role in delivering NZSL services and supporting the Deaf community, many operate with **limited resources, inconsistent funding, and increasing operational pressures**.

This section outlines the **key areas of need**, including business operations, NZSL tutor and workforce development, and NZSL student access and participation. Each sub-section provides an overview of current challenges, barriers, and gaps that impact the ability of NZSL businesses to deliver high-quality and accessible services nationwide.

Together, these areas highlight the need for a **coordinated and sustainable support framework**.

A summary at the end of this section will consolidate the key reasons why targeted investment in business operations is essential to strengthen NZSL delivery, support Deaf leadership, and ensure the long-term sustainability of NZSL across New Zealand.

Business Capacity

NZSL businesses operate with **very different levels of capacity and resources**.

Some businesses have:

- administration staff
- teams of NZSL tutors
- websites and office equipment

Other businesses operate as solo **Deaf entrepreneurs**, with limited infrastructure and resources.

To support the network fairly, each Deaf business owner should be consulted to **identify their specific financial and operational support needs**.

Examples of support that could strengthen NZSL businesses include:

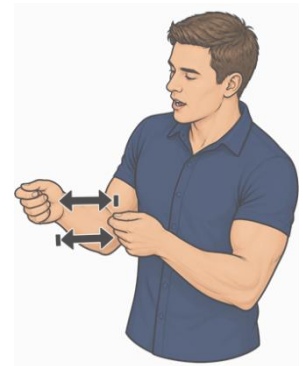
- Bulk purchasing of essential teaching equipment (laptops, data projectors).
- A **national Learning Management System** to support NZSL student learning.
- A shared **teaching platform** for NZSL tutors.
- Centralised support for organising **NZSL Camps**, reducing administrative workload for businesses.
- Funding for **marketing and promotion** of NZSL courses.
- Administrative funding to organise **regional NZSL camps and local NZSL clubs**.

Administration Support

Several NZSL businesses face challenges maintaining operations due to **limited business training, qualifications, and experience**.

Most NZSL business owners are also **NZSL tutors**, meaning they carry dual responsibilities:

- teaching NZSL courses
- managing business operations



As a result, business owners work **significantly more hours than they are paid for**, simply to keep their businesses operating.

Operational costs can be significant, including:

- Zoom licences
- Microsoft Office subscriptions
- Adobe Creative software
- anti-virus software
- Xero accounting subscriptions
- other digital tools required to run NZSL courses

Since most NZSL courses run **four times per year (one per academic term)**, income can be inconsistent while business expenses remain constant.

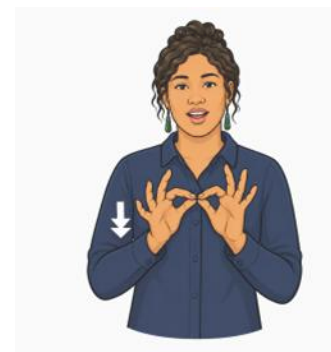
During the COVID-19 pandemic, these NZSL businesses struggled to continue operating. Grants and government subsidies helped temporarily, but **long-term sustainability remains uncertain**.

Communication Access: NZSL Interpreters

Organising NZSL Interpreters

Deaf business owners sometimes meet with organisations, government agencies, and businesses to establish NZSL courses and partnerships.

These meetings often require **NZSL interpreters**, which Deaf business owners must organise themselves. This creates additional **workload, coordination responsibilities, and financial burden**.



Although **Ministry of Social Development (MSD) Job Support Funding** may cover interpreter costs, it does not cover the administrative time required to:

- locate and contact interpreters
- organise interpreter bookings
- prepare interpreter job information and meeting materials
- manage schedule changes and meeting rescheduling
- process interpreter invoices and payments

This **administrative burden can be substantial** and may reduce the capacity of Deaf business owners to focus on **business development, teaching, networking, and long-term planning**.

In addition, Deaf business owners often struggle to access professional development opportunities, due to **limited accessible information and support**.

There is currently **no clear central guidance** available for Deaf business owners regarding interpreter coordination and communication access within business settings.

Interpreter Funding Limitations

Funding support for NZSL interpreters available to Deaf individuals through **MSD Job Support Funding** has remained largely unchanged for approximately **15 years**, despite significant increases in interpreter costs over time.

Interpreter hourly rates have increased due to **inflation, professional standards, and growing demand**, while available funding allocations have not kept pace with these changes.

As a result, many Deaf individuals exhaust their available interpreter funding within only a few months of the year, leaving them without adequate communication access for the remainder of the funding period.

This creates significant barriers for Deaf business owners who rely on interpreters to participate in:

- meetings
- networking opportunities
- professional development
- and business negotiations

Without sufficient interpreter funding, **Deaf entrepreneurs face ongoing disadvantages** when engaging with businesses, organisations, and government agencies.

This effectively creates a **structural barrier to Deaf participation in business, leadership, and economic development.**

NZSL Interpreter Workforce Shortages

National consultation undertaken by the **NZSL Board** has identified ongoing **NZSL interpreter workforce shortages, regional access barriers, limited interpreter training pathways, and funding challenges** affecting Deaf people's access to interpreting services across Aotearoa New Zealand (New Zealand Sign Language Board, 2023).

In many regions, Deaf people experience difficulties securing qualified interpreters due to **limited workforce availability** and increasing demand for interpreting services across:

- education
- healthcare
- workplaces
- government services
- community settings

Limited interpreter availability can result in:

- delays accessing services
- reduced participation opportunities
- communication barriers
- additional stress for Deaf individuals and Deaf business owners

Strengthening interpreter workforce development, accessibility systems, and communication support services is **critical to supporting Deaf-led NZSL businesses, improving operational capacity**, and strengthening the long-term sustainability of the NZSL sector.

Finance and Accounting Support

Nearly all NZSL business owners are Deaf, and for many, **English is a second or third language**. This can make it difficult to fully understand financial and legal requirements associated with running a business.

Common challenges include understanding:

- GST returns
- tax payments
- provisional tax
- profit and loss statements
- balance sheets
- financial terminology such as margins, depreciation, and profit



There is a strong need for financial training **delivered directly in NZSL**.

This could include:

- face-to-face training workshops in NZSL
- NZSL video explanations of key financial concepts
- a centralised information platform for Deaf business owners

Ideally, government agencies such as Inland Revenue Department (IRD) could provide NZSL-accessible resources and videos explaining taxation and business obligations.

Marketing/promotion

These NZSL businesses lack the resources needed to produce **high-quality teaching and promotional materials**.

Currently, NZSL businesses in New Zealand have very limited access to:

- filming studios
- filming equipment
- professional video editing resources
- accessible production software and digital media tools



These resources are essential for creating:

- NZSL teaching materials
- promotional videos for NZSL courses
- social media content
- accessible NZSL information and community engagement materials

Although some Deaf people have skills in filmmaking, graphic design, and digital media production, NZSL businesses often cannot afford to employ them.

This limits opportunities for **Deaf-led content creation** and reduces the sector's overall media capability.

A **coordinated marketing support system** would allow skilled professionals to assist with:

- campaign planning
- graphic design
- video production
- NZSL video narration
- captions and accessibility
- social media strategy and digital communications

It is also essential that marketing content is **culturally appropriate and linguistically accurate**.

Incorrect terminology, messaging, or imagery can negatively impact the Deaf community. For example, terms such as “hearing impaired” are often viewed negatively, while identities such as Deaf person or NZSL user are generally preferred within the Deaf community.

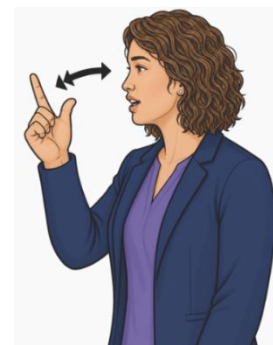
Marketing materials must therefore be developed by people who understand both NZSL language and Deaf culture.

These individuals act as **cultural mediators**, ensuring messages are accurate and respectful for both Deaf and wider audiences.

C. NZSL Teachers Needs

The development and sustainability of the NZSL tutor workforce is critical to ensuring the continued growth of NZSL education across Aotearoa New Zealand.

As demand for NZSL courses increases nationwide, the availability of **qualified, well-supported NZSL tutors has not kept pace**, creating significant pressure on existing teaching capacity.



This section outlines the key areas of need relating to NZSL tutors and teachers. It will examine challenges in **tutor training, mentoring support, cultural awareness, and career development pathways**, as well as the need to strengthen systems that support tutor progression and professional standards.

In particular, the section highlights:

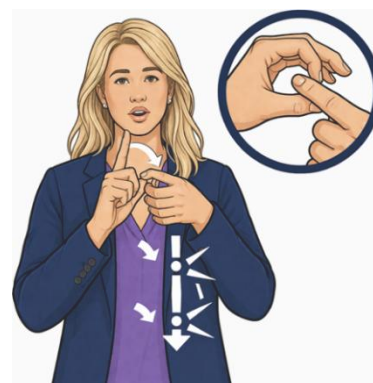
- the need for regular and accessible professional development training
- the importance of structured mentoring systems to support new tutors
- the role of cultural awareness and iwi-based knowledge in responsible NZSL teaching
- the lack of clear teaching pathways for Deaf individuals entering the profession
- the shortage of tutors with NZSL and Te Reo Māori capability
- opportunities to strengthen the NZSL tutor registration system

Together, these areas demonstrate the need for a **coordinated and sustainable approach to NZSL tutor development**. Strengthening the tutor workforce will not only improve the quality and consistency of NZSL education but also support the growth of Deaf-led teaching and leadership across the sector.

Tutors/Teachers Needs Survey

The **survey** should also collect information from NZSL tutors/teachers, including:

- challenges and barriers in their teaching work
- support needed from employers, contracting organisations, or NZSL businesses
- support needed from the NZSL Business Network or NZSL Teachers Association



- their long-term professional goals
- workload, work hours, and overall working conditions
- fair pay, contract arrangements, and pay review considerations
- access to professional development, mentoring, and wellbeing support
- job sustainability and long-term career pathways within NZSL industry

Survey results would **provide evidence to inform future planning, workforce development, recruitment, and retention within NZSL industry.**

The survey **process should also be culturally appropriate** and accessible for Deaf participants, including the use of NZSL, focus group discussions, interviews, and visual communication approaches where appropriate.

Tutor Training Camps and Professional Development

The number of NZSL courses is increasing rapidly, but the supply of **trained NZSL tutors** is not keeping pace. In the past, NZSL tutor training was delivered nationally through NZSLTA, Northern Tutors Branch and Merge NZ but formal training programmes have been inconsistent due to **limited funding**.



As a result, **regular professional development opportunities for NZSL tutors are urgently needed** to strengthen and sustain the **NZSL teaching workforce**.

NZSL immersion camps are commonly organised for students and are widely recognised as highly beneficial for strengthening NZSL learning, confidence, and community connection.

However, similar camps and immersive professional development opportunities for **NZSL tutors are rare and often overlooked**.

There is a strong need for **regular tutor camps and professional development retreats** to provide dedicated spaces for NZSL tutors to:

- upskill and strengthen teaching capability
- share teaching knowledge, resources, and experience
- build mentoring relationships and peer support networks
- discuss challenges, teaching strategies, and best practice within the sector

- strengthen cultural knowledge and consistency in NZSL teaching
- support tutor wellbeing and long-term workforce sustainability

These opportunities would also strengthen collaboration and professional connections across the NZSL teaching workforce throughout Aotearoa New Zealand.

*Regular NZSL tutor camps and professional development opportunities would contribute to **stronger workforce development, increased tutor confidence, improved teaching quality, and the long-term sustainability of NZSL teaching services.***

Tutor Mentoring

New tutors benefit greatly from **mentoring and observation opportunities**. Some NZSL businesses already provide informal mentoring, including:

- classroom observation of experienced tutors
- training on teaching systems, technology, class management, and materials
- observation of online and onsite NZSL classes



A national mentoring programme would strengthen tutor development.

Te Reo Māori and Youth Tutors

There is currently a shortage of tutors fluent in both NZSL and Te Reo Māori. Greater support is needed for **Māori NZSL tutors**, including opportunities to teach within marae communities and contribute to culturally grounded teaching and learning environments.

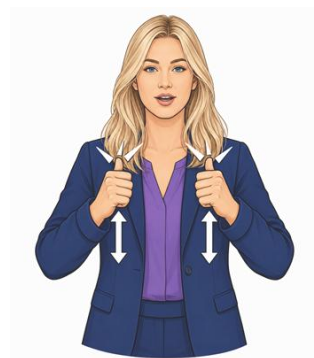
There is also a need to support the development of **youth NZSL tutors** and emerging Deaf leaders. Encouraging younger generations into tutoring pathways will help strengthen the future sustainability of the **NZSL teaching workforce** and ensure continued intergenerational transmission of NZSL, Deaf culture, and community knowledge.

NZSL Teaching Pathways

More information and clearer pathways are needed to support Deaf people who wish to become NZSL tutors. Strengthening NZSL teaching pathways will help grow and sustain the **NZSL teaching workforce** across Aotearoa New Zealand.

This could include:

- NZSL tutor career pathway guides
- NZSL video explanations outlining training and registration steps
- scholarships and national or international training opportunities
- mentoring and leadership opportunities for emerging tutors



Developing clearer pathways into tutoring will help encourage more Deaf people and fluent NZSL users to enter the profession and contribute to the long-term sustainability and growth of the NZSL teaching workforce.

Organisational Capacity of the New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association (NZSLTA)

The NZSLTA plays a critical role in supporting the NZSL teaching workforce through tutor registration, professional development, networking, and the promotion of teaching standards across the sector.

However, NZSLTA currently operates primarily as a voluntary organisation and relies heavily on the contribution of volunteers to deliver many of its functions and services.

Over recent years, demand for NZSL learning has increased significantly across New Zealand, resulting in growing expectations and responsibilities being placed on NZSLTA. This includes increasing demand for tutor registration, professional development, mentoring, workforce development, resource sharing, and sector coordination.

While NZSLTA continues to make a valuable contribution to the sector, its current voluntary structure may limit its ability to respond effectively to future growth and increasing sector-wide demands.

Strengthening the organisational capacity and long-term sustainability of NZSLTA would support a more coordinated approach to workforce development, professional standards, tutor support, and national sector leadership.

The growth in NZSL learning has outpaced the capacity of many existing support systems, highlighting the need for sustainable investment in workforce development and sector infrastructure.

D. Student Needs

Supporting NZSL students is essential to ensuring the **long-term sustainability and continued use of NZSL across Aotearoa New Zealand**.

As demand for NZSL learning continues to grow, students play a critical role in strengthening the future NZSL workforce, improving accessibility, and increasing everyday use of NZSL within communities.



However, many students face barriers that limit their ability to **access, continue, and progress in NZSL learning**. These challenges include financial constraints, limited access to courses in regional areas, lack of structured learning pathways, and insufficient opportunities to practise NZSL in real-life settings.

This section outlines the key areas of need for NZSL students. It will examine:

- the importance of **social practice opportunities** such as NZSL clubs and community activities
- the role of **specialised NZSL courses** to meet diverse learner needs
- the need for **financial support** to enable ongoing NZSL learning, particularly for families/ whanau of Deaf children aged 6 years and up.
- the development of **clear pathways into NZSL-related careers**, including interpreter training
- the importance of **national data collection** through a student needs survey to inform future planning

Subsidies could enable students to continue their NZSL learning and strengthen opportunities to progress into NZSL-related careers and the wider workforce.

Together, these areas highlight the importance of a **coordinated and well-supported NZSL learning environment**.

Investment in NZSL students is also an investment in the future NZSL workforce. Supporting learners to progress in their NZSL journey helps develop future tutors, facilitators, and leaders who will **contribute to the ongoing growth and sustainability of NZSL services** across New Zealand.

NZSL Hub and Community Learning Spaces

Most importantly, there is a need to develop an NZSL Hub to help strengthen community access to NZSL by creating more visible and accessible NZSL learning environments across Aotearoa New Zealand.

This concept could include partnerships with community-based spaces such as:

- preschools and early childhood centres
- after-hours learning spaces
- restaurants and cafés
- school halls and community venues

These environments could support NZSL classes, social practice opportunities, community gatherings, **Deaf-led activities, and increased public exposure to NZSL in everyday settings.**

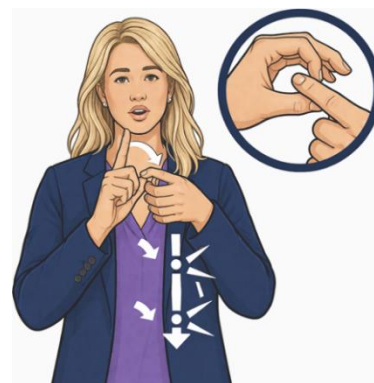
An NZSL Hub approach would help strengthen community connection, increase visibility of NZSL, and support more accessible pathways for people to engage with the language and Deaf community.

Students Needs Survey

A national survey is needed to better understand the experiences, motivations, and support needs of NZSL students across Aotearoa.

This survey would collect information such as:

- why students choose to learn NZSL
- where they live
- their long-term goals
- whether they have connections with Deaf people
- the level of support available for their learning



The survey should also collect information from **NZSL tutors**, including:

- challenges and barriers in their teaching work
- support needed from employers
- support needed from the NZSL Business Network or NZSLTA
- their long-term professional goals

Survey results would provide **evidence to inform future planning and investment in NZSL teaching services.**

Specialised NZSL Courses

There is increasing demand for specialised NZSL courses, including:

- NZSL for school children including Deaf children
- NZSL for older adults (elderly)
- NZSL for hard of hearing people (lost their hearing)
- NZSL for professionals (sector-specific vocabulary)
- NZSL for teachers of Deaf children
- NZSL resources supporting **NCEA NZSL learning**

NZSL Clubs

Many students living in regional and smaller communities have limited or no access to ongoing NZSL learning opportunities. Local NZSL clubs and community practice groups play an important role in helping students maintain and strengthen their NZSL skills through regular social interaction and community-based learning environments.

With financial support, NZSL Club Trust and Merge NZ have successfully established NZSL clubs in selected locations across New Zealand, including:

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------|----------------|
| • Whangarei | • Waikato | • Christchurch |
| • Mangawhai | • Napier | • Dunedin |
| • Auckland | • Wellington | • Invercargill |

However, several of these initiatives have been placed on hold due to limited funding availability and operational capacity.

Strengthening sustainable support for local NZSL clubs and community practice groups would **help increase regional access to NZSL, strengthen community connection**, and provide more regular opportunities for ongoing NZSL practice and immersion.

NZSL Camps

NZSL immersion camps are widely recognised as highly effective environments for strengthening NZSL learning, language confidence, and community connection. Immersive environments provide students with extended opportunities to use NZSL naturally throughout the day, supporting more rapid language development and increased confidence in communication.



Historically, regional tutor groups organised NZSL immersion camps across New Zealand.

However, many of these initiatives became difficult to sustain due to increasing health and safety requirements, administrative responsibilities, and financial pressures.

NZSL4U, a former NZSL business, previously organised national NZSL immersion camps before ceasing operations in January 2026.

More recently, NZSL immersion camps were successfully organised by Merge NZ in:

- Nelson (May 2023)
- Rotorua (June 2023)

Regular investment in regional and national NZSL immersion camps would provide benefits for both learners and the NZSL teaching workforce.

Benefits for Learners

- strengthened NZSL language development and confidence
- increased opportunities for NZSL immersion and real-world language use
- stronger community connection and peer learning opportunities
- improved progression and retention in NZSL learning pathways

Benefits for Deaf Tutors and Leaders

- strengthening leadership, mentoring opportunities for Deaf tutors and facilitators
- employment opportunities for Deaf tutors and facilitators
- opportunities to share teaching knowledge, and best practice across the sector
- support for workforce development and growth of the NZSL sector

6. Proposed National NZSL Support Framework

Priority Areas for Business Operations

To strengthen the sustainability, capability, and long-term growth of Deaf-led NZSL businesses across Aotearoa New Zealand, the following priority areas have been identified.

NZSL businesses across Aotearoa New Zealand operate with very different levels of capacity, infrastructure, and resources. While some businesses may have administration support, tutor teams, and established systems, others operate as solo Deaf-led businesses with limited operational support and infrastructure.

A flexible and equitable support approach is therefore needed to reflect the varying needs across the sector.

Priority Summary

The following priority areas have been identified to strengthen and sustain NZSL business operations across Aotearoa New Zealand:

1. Business Infrastructure and Equipment
2. Business and Operational Support
3. Marketing and Promotion
4. Communication Access (NZSL Interpreters)
5. Finance and Accounting Support
6. Shared Business Systems and Platforms

NZSL businesses and services also contribute to the wider New Zealand economy through employment, education, accessibility services, community programmes, and professional development opportunities.

As demand for NZSL learning and accessibility continues to increase, the NZSL sector represents a growing area of workforce development, service delivery, and community participation.

Together, these areas highlight the need for a coordinated and sustainable support **framework to strengthen NZSL delivery, support Deaf leadership, and ensure the long-term sustainability of NZSL across Aotearoa New Zealand.**

1. Business Infrastructure and Equipment

All NZSL businesses operate with limited infrastructure, technology, and teaching resources, which can affect their ability to deliver high-quality NZSL courses and business operations effectively.

Funding support is needed to ensure NZSL businesses have access to essential tools and infrastructure required to deliver NZSL teaching, online learning, and community engagement activities.

Priority support includes:

- computers, laptops, and teaching equipment
- software subscriptions and licences for business operations and online teaching
- data projectors and presentation tools
- filming equipment for NZSL teaching materials and promotional content
- reliable internet access and digital teaching platforms

Providing equitable access to infrastructure and technology would strengthen operational capability, improve teaching delivery, and support long-term business sustainability.

2. Business and Operational Support

A coordinated range of operational and business support is needed to strengthen the sustainability and growth of Deaf-led NZSL businesses. This includes not only day-to-day operational assistance, but also start-up support, business capacity development, and seed funding to help businesses to establish, stabilise, and expand their services.



Most NZSL business owners are also NZSL tutors and often manage multiple aspects of business operations themselves. In addition, many Deaf sole traders balance other employment or work commitments because income from NZSL-related work alone is often inconsistent and may not provide long-term financial stability.

Operational costs can place considerable financial pressure on NZSL businesses, particularly where course income may fluctuate throughout the year while business expenses remain

ongoing. Costs may include digital teaching platforms, accounting software, website maintenance, design software, AI subscription services, cybersecurity systems, and other digital tools required to deliver NZSL services professionally and remain competitive in evolving online learning environments.

The COVID-19 pandemic and increasing fuel costs during the petrol crisis highlighted the financial vulnerability of many NZSL businesses, particularly those delivering regional and community-based NZSL courses, reinforcing the need for long-term sustainable support systems.

Support is needed for:

- administrative staff support to manage communications, enrolments, and coordination
- operational systems and workflow management to improve efficiency and consistency
- business software subscriptions such as Zoom, Microsoft 365, Xero, and digital teaching platforms
- event coordination for NZSL courses, camps, and community activities
- start-up and seed funding for new or emerging NZSL businesses
- business capability development, including financial literacy, compliance, and business management training

Strengthening operational support systems would help reduce administrative burden, improve sustainability, and support the long-term growth of Deaf-led NZSL businesses.

3. Marketing and Promotion

These NZSL businesses lack the resources needed to produce high-quality teaching and promotional materials. There is also a need for Deaf business leaders to access a collective learning environment where they can build skills in marketing, advertising, and digital promotion.

Providing NZSL-accessible marketing training and professional support would help Deaf business owners strengthen their promotional capability, expand their reach, and increase visibility of NZSL across Aotearoa New Zealand. Effective marketing also plays an important role in increasing public awareness and everyday visibility of NZSL within communities.



Currently, NZSL businesses in New Zealand have very limited access to:

- filming studios
- filming equipment
- professional video editing resources
- accessible production software and digital media tools

These resources are essential for creating:

- NZSL teaching materials
- promotional videos for NZSL courses
- social media content
- accessible NZSL information and community engagement materials
- AI-generated NZSL videos and digital accessibility content

Although some Deaf people have skills in filmmaking, graphic design, and digital media production, NZSL businesses often cannot afford to employ them. This limits opportunities for Deaf-led content creation and reduces the sector's overall media capability.

A coordinated marketing support system could assist with:

- marketing campaign planning
- graphic design and promotional materials
- NZSL video production and editing
- captioning and accessible communication tools
- social media strategy and digital communications

It is also essential that marketing content is culturally appropriate and linguistically accurate. Incorrect terminology, messaging, or imagery can negatively impact the Deaf community.

For example, terms such as “hearing impaired” are often viewed negatively, while identities such as Deaf person or NZSL user are generally preferred within the Deaf community.

Marketing materials should therefore be developed by **people who understand both NZSL language and Deaf culture**. These individuals act as cultural mediators, ensuring messages are accurate and respectful for both Deaf and wider audiences.

4. Communication Access (NZSL Interpreters)

Deaf business owners regularly require NZSL interpreters when engaging with organisations, government agencies, funders, and business partners.

Securing interpreters requires significant time, energy, and coordination, creating additional stress and administrative burden for Deaf business owners. This may include locating available interpreters, coordinating bookings, preparing meeting information, managing schedule changes, and processing invoices and funding requirements.



Support is needed to cover:

- interpreter booking and coordination
- administrative time required to organise interpreting services
- interpreter costs where funding gaps exist

This support is essential to ensure Deaf business owners can fully participate in business development activities, networking opportunities, meetings, professional development, and decision-making processes.

Interpreter Funding Limitations

Funding support for ***NZSL interpreters available to Deaf individuals has remained largely unchanged for many years***, despite significant increases in interpreter costs over time. Interpreter hourly rates have risen due to inflation, professional standards, and increasing demand, yet funding allocations have not kept pace with these changes.

As a result, some Deaf people exhaust their available interpreter funding within only a few months of the year, leaving them without adequate communication access for the remainder of the funding period.

This creates a significant barrier for Deaf business owners who rely on interpreters to participate in meetings, networking opportunities, professional development, and business negotiations. ***Without sufficient interpreter funding, Deaf entrepreneurs face ongoing disadvantages when engaging with businesses, organisations, and government agencies.***

This effectively creates a structural barrier to Deaf participation in business, leadership, and economic development.

5. Finance and Accounting Support

Access to **financial literacy training and regulatory information remains a key barrier for many Deaf business owners**. Providing business and financial information in NZSL is essential to support equitable access, informed decision-making, and long-term business sustainability.

Government agencies such as the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment (MBIE) and Inland Revenue (IRD) have an opportunity to improve accessibility by providing business and financial resources in NZSL.

Common challenges may include understanding:

- GST returns / tax payments and provisional tax
- balance sheets / profit and loss statements
- financial terminology such as margins, depreciation, and profit



Priority areas include:

- NZSL-accessible financial and business training resources, including NZSL video explanations of tax, GST, business compliance, and financial/legal concepts
- access to accounting guidance, advisory services, and ongoing support

Providing information in NZSL would strengthen financial confidence, improve decision-making, and support long-term business sustainability.

6. Shared Business Systems and Platforms

Greater collaboration and shared systems could improve efficiency, reduce duplication, and help smaller NZSL businesses access resources more sustainably.

Potential initiatives include:

- a shared Learning Management System (LMS) for NZSL students
- a national platform for NZSL tutors and course coordination
- shared teaching resources and curriculum materials
- shared booking, enrolment, or communication systems
- collaborative marketing and promotional platforms

Shared systems and digital platforms could strengthen collaboration, reduce administrative burden, and support the sustainability of NZSL businesses.

Priority Areas for Strengthening the NZSL Teaching Workforce

Strategic recommendations to strengthen and sustain the NZSL teaching workforce across Aotearoa New Zealand.



As demand for NZSL learning continues to grow across Aotearoa New Zealand, greater investment is needed to support and strengthen the NZSL teaching workforce. Many tutors currently have limited access to regular professional development, mentoring, teaching resources, and coordinated support systems.

Priority Summary

The following priority areas have been identified to strengthen and sustain the NZSL teaching workforce across Aotearoa New Zealand:

1. Establish a National NZSL Teaching Workforce Working Group
2. Conduct a National NZSL Teaching Workforce Survey
3. Develop a National Professional Development Framework
4. Deliver Regular Tutor Training Camps and Professional Development
5. Develop Tutor Training Packages and Career Pathways
6. Strengthen Mentoring Systems and Peer Support Networks
7. Review and Strengthen the TeachSign Hub
8. Provide Teaching Kits and Practical Teaching Resources for Tutors

1. National NZSL Teaching Workforce Working Group

There is a need to establish a national NZSL teaching workforce working group to help coordinate future planning and strengthen collaboration across the sector.

This collaborative group could include representatives from:

- NZSLTA (New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association)
- NZSL businesses
- Deaf organisations
- experienced NZSL tutors / youth representatives
- Māori NZSL tutors

The purpose of this group would be to:

- coordinate workforce planning
- identify national priorities and workforce gaps
- reduce duplication across the sector
- support collaboration and information sharing
- guide future strategy and long-term workforce sustainability

2. National NZSL Teaching Workforce Survey (Urgent)

There is an urgent need for a national survey to better understand the current NZSL teaching workforce across New Zealand.

Workforce data is needed to identify:

- tutor/teacher numbers and regional distribution
- workload, working conditions, and sustainability
- workforce shortages and future career intentions
- training, mentoring, wellbeing, and burnout

This information would support:

- policy and investment decisions
- strategic workforce planning
- recruitment and retention initiatives
- long-term workforce development

The survey should be accessible and culturally appropriate for Deaf participants, including the use of NZSL, interviews, focus groups, and visual communication methods where appropriate.

3. National Professional Development Framework

One of the most important next steps is the development of a coordinated national professional development (PD) framework for the NZSL teaching workforce.

A national PD framework would strengthen the quality, consistency, sustainability, and long-term growth of NZSL teaching across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The framework could include:

- regular professional development training

- tutor camps and retreats
- mentoring systems
- online learning opportunities
- cultural competency and Te Ao Māori training
- youth tutor development pathways
- workforce wellbeing support
- nationally coordinated teaching resources

There is also a need for a permanent national Professional Development Manager role under NZSLTA to coordinate these workforce initiatives and support long-term implementation.

4. Tutor Training Camps and Professional Development

There is a strong need for regular and consistent NZSL tutor training camps and professional development opportunities delivered across accessible regions throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. These opportunities would help strengthen teaching quality, mentoring relationships, workforce sustainability, and collaboration across the NZSL teaching workforce.

The NZSL Business Network (NBN) believes that NZSLTA would be an appropriate organisation to coordinate and host:

- annual NZSL tutor weekend training camps in both the North Island and South Island
- a national NZSL tutor retreat held once a year in rotating locations across New Zealand
- intensive two-day tutor training opportunities linked to the NZSLTA bi-annual conference

These events would create valuable opportunities for tutors to:

- strengthen teaching capability and confidence
- share teaching strategies, resources, and experiences
- build mentoring relationships and peer support networks
- discuss challenges and best practice within the sector
- strengthen cultural knowledge and consistency in NZSL teaching
- support tutor wellbeing and long-term workforce sustainability
- provide supportive spaces for Deaf tutors to discuss the challenges of managing multiple roles within the Deaf community, including teaching, leadership, advocacy, mentoring, and community responsibilities.

5. Tutor Training Packages and Career Pathways

There is a need for comprehensive take-home training resources to support new and emerging NZSL tutors. This includes a structured NZSL Tutor Handbook and access to a national network system to guide tutors through their teaching journey and connect them with opportunities across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Training packages should also be designed to meet the different needs and experience levels of:

- trainee NZSL tutors
- provisional or emerging tutors
- qualified and experienced NZSL tutors

This could include staged or tiered resource packages, allowing tutors to progressively access more advanced teaching materials, mentoring opportunities, leadership development, and specialised training as they gain experience and qualifications.

Training packages could include:

- NZSL teaching materials and lesson resources
- QR-linked NZSL video content to support teaching and learning
- a Tutor Handbook outlining teaching standards, cultural expectations, and best practice guidelines
- information on the NBN and how to engage with the tutor community
- career pathway guidance for NZSL tutors
- a list of NZSL businesses and Deaf organisations to support employment pathways
- guidance on accessing mentoring, peer support, and professional development opportunities through the network system

Developing structured tutor training packages would help strengthen consistency, confidence, and professional capability across the NZSL teaching workforce. The NBN and NZSLTA would be well positioned to work collaboratively on the development and coordination of these training resources and workforce support initiatives to strengthen the long-term sustainability of the NZSL teaching workforce.

6. Mentoring Systems and Peer Support Networks

There is a need for a nationally coordinated mentoring system to support trainee, emerging, and experienced NZSL tutors throughout their teaching journey.

Paid mentors could provide both online and face-to-face support, helping tutors strengthen teaching confidence, classroom practice, cultural understanding, and professional capacity.

A centralised online mentoring system could include:

- mentor profiles and areas of expertise
- tutor booking systems
- online mentoring sessions
- peer support opportunities
- teaching observations and feedback
- co-teaching and leadership opportunities
- connections with local mentors and mentees to strengthen regional support networks

This project could be developed under NZSLTA by expanding the current [NZSL Tutors Directory](#) to include mentor profiles, areas of expertise, and mentor availability. An electronic mentoring request form could also be developed for mentees, alongside funding support to recognise mentors' time and contributions.

Strengthening mentoring and peer support systems would help reduce isolation, improve teaching quality, and support the long-term sustainability of the NZSL teaching workforce.

7. TeachSign Hub

There is a need to review and strengthen the [TeachSign website](#), including identifying recommendations for ongoing maintenance, development, accessibility, and long-term sustainability.

The TeachSign Hub should be expanded and strengthened as a centralised national platform supporting the NZSL teaching workforce through:

- expanded teaching resources and lesson materials, with a stronger focus on online teaching delivery and support for Level 3 NZSL curriculum development
- recorded professional development sessions
- additional NZSL teaching videos and training resources
- tutor networking and collaboration opportunities
- mentoring information and mentor access systems
- workforce updates and sector announcements
- access to career pathway information and sector resources

There is also a need for ongoing maintenance, accessibility improvements, content development, and long-term sustainability planning for the TeachSign Hub to ensure it continues to meet the evolving needs of NZSL tutors across Aotearoa New Zealand.

8. Teaching Kits and Practical Teaching Resources

Equitable access to teaching equipment, resources, and professional support is essential to strengthen the long-term sustainability of the **NZSL teaching workforce**, particularly for trainee, emerging, and provisional NZSL tutors.

Currently, there are different groups of NZSL tutors across the sector, and access to teaching resources and equipment can vary significantly.

In some cases, experienced or registered tutors may have greater access to higher-level teaching materials and technology, while trainee or provisional tutors may have limited access to practical teaching resources and classroom support.

Improving equitable access to resources, mentoring, and teaching kits would help strengthen confidence, teaching capability, and long-term workforce development within the NZSL teaching workforce.

A free NZSL teaching kit or teaching bag for registered trainee NZSL tutors could include:

- teaching documents, including the NZSL Adults Level One Community Education Curriculum and related teaching materials
- printed NZSL Tutor Guide books
- student activity sheets for classroom teaching
- handouts, fingerspelling cards, and homework resources for students
- reliable equipment such as a data projector, laptop, professional backdrop, and portable lighting to support online teaching
- classroom-related items such as whiteboard markers, laminated resources, stationery, first aid kits, and extension cables
- petrol vouchers or travel support for tutors delivering classes in regional or rural areas

Providing accessible and practical teaching resources would help reduce barriers for tutors, improve teaching quality, and strengthen the long-term sustainability of the NZSL teaching workforce.

Priority Areas for Supporting NZSL Students and Learning Pathways

Strategic recommendations to strengthen and support NZSL learning opportunities across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Many students face barriers that limit their ability to access, continue, and progress in NZSL learning. These challenges include financial constraints, limited access to courses in regional areas, lack of structured learning pathways, and insufficient opportunities to practise NZSL in real-life settings.

Priority Summary

The following priority areas have been identified to strengthen and support NZSL learning opportunities across Aotearoa New Zealand:

- Financial Support for NZSL Learning
- Access to NZSL Learning in Rural and Regional Areas
- NZSL Hubs and Community Practice Groups
- Specialised NZSL Courses
- NZSL Camps and Immersion Opportunities
- Understanding Student Needs Through National Survey Data



Together, these areas highlight the importance of a coordinated and well-supported NZSL learning environment.

Strengthening support for NZSL students will not only improve learning outcomes but also contribute to the growth of the NZSL workforce and the wider use of NZSL across society.

1. Financial Support for NZSL Learning

Many students face financial barriers when continuing their NZSL learning beyond introductory level (Level 1). Employers often support only the first level of NZSL courses, which limits students' ability to progress toward higher levels of NZSL proficiency and long-term language development.

Priority support includes:

- subsidies for intermediate (Level 2) and advanced (Level 3) NZSL courses
- financial support for specialised NZSL training
- scholarships for students who wish to continue long-term NZSL learning
- financial assistance for families and whānau of Deaf children learning NZSL

Providing financial support would encourage more students to continue their NZSL learning journey and strengthen pathways into NZSL-related careers and the wider workforce.

2. Access to NZSL Learning in Rural and Regional Areas

Students living in rural and regional communities often have limited or no access to NZSL courses. This creates inequitable access to learning opportunities and can limit students' ability to maintain and develop their NZSL skills.

Support is needed to:

- expand NZSL course delivery in regional communities, including iwi and Māori communities
- support online learning options where local classes are not available
- strengthen regional tutor availability and outreach opportunities

Improving regional access would help ensure more equitable access to NZSL learning opportunities across Aotearoa New Zealand.

3. NZSL Hubs and Community Practice Groups

Regular NZSL practice opportunities are essential for students to maintain and improve their language skills. NZSL clubs and community practice groups provide supportive environments where students can practise NZSL in real-life settings and strengthen their understanding of Deaf culture and community connections.

Most importantly, there is a need to ***develop an NZSL Hub to help strengthen community access to NZSL*** by creating more visible and accessible NZSL learning environments.

This concept could include partnerships with community-based spaces such as:

- preschools and early childhood centres
- after-hours learning spaces

- restaurants and cafés
- school halls and community venues

These environments could support NZSL classes, social practice opportunities, community gatherings, advanced-level student-led activities, and greater public visibility of NZSL in everyday settings.

An NZSL Hub approach would help strengthen community connection, ***increase visibility of NZSL***, and support more accessible pathways for people to engage with the language and Deaf community.

With financial support, NZSL Club Trust and Merge NZ have successfully established NZSL clubs in selected regions across New Zealand.

However, several additional NZSL clubs and community practice groups have been placed on hold due to limited funding availability, highlighting the ongoing need for sustainable support to strengthen local NZSL learning and community engagement opportunities nationwide.

4. Specialised NZSL Courses

There is increasing demand for specialised NZSL learning opportunities designed to meet the needs of different groups and communities.

Priority areas include:

- NZSL courses for families and whānau of Deaf children
- NZSL courses for school children
- NZSL courses for professionals working in education, healthcare, emergency services, and government sectors
- NZSL learning opportunities for older adults and community groups
- NZSL courses for hard of hearing people and people experiencing hearing loss
- resources supporting NZSL within the NCEA curriculum
- sector-specific NZSL vocabulary and workplace communication training

Expanding specialised NZSL learning opportunities would help strengthen accessibility, increase NZSL use across different sectors of society, and support wider community engagement with NZSL.

5. NZSL Camps and Immersion Opportunities

NZSL immersion camps are highly effective learning environments where students can strengthen their language skills through continuous NZSL interaction and community engagement. Students frequently report that immersion camps significantly improve their confidence, language development, and understanding of Deaf culture because they are immersed in NZSL conversations throughout the day.

Historically, regional tutor groups organised NZSL camps, but many of these stopped due to increasing health and safety requirements, which created additional administrative and financial challenges. NZSL4U, a former NZSL business, previously organised national NZSL camps before closing in January 2026.

More recently, NZSL immersion camps were successfully organised by Merge NZ in:

- Nelson (May 2023)
- Rotorua (June 2023)

Funding regular regional and national NZSL camps would support:

- faster NZSL language development through immersion
- stronger understanding of Deaf culture and community
- leadership development within the Deaf community
- employment opportunities for Deaf tutors and facilitators
- stronger community connection and peer learning opportunities

Regular immersion opportunities would help strengthen long-term NZSL learning outcomes and support the wider growth and visibility of NZSL across Aotearoa New Zealand.

6. Understanding Student Needs Through National Survey Data

A national survey is needed to better understand the experiences, motivations, and support needs of NZSL students across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The survey could collect information such as:

- why people choose to learn NZSL
- barriers to continuing NZSL learning
- geographic areas with limited access to NZSL courses
- students' long-term goals and learning pathways

- whether students have connections with Deaf people
- the level of support available for their learning

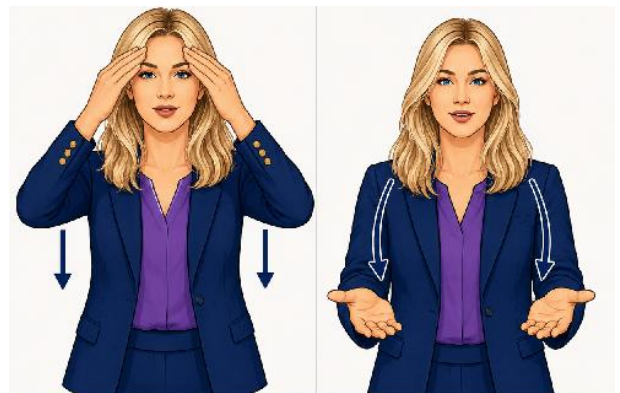
The survey should also collect information from NZSL tutors, including:

- challenges and barriers in their teaching work
- support needed from employers or NZSL businesses
- support needed from the NZSL Business Network (NBN) or NZSLTA
- workload, work conditions, and wellbeing considerations
- long-term professional goals and workforce intentions

Survey results would provide valuable evidence to inform future planning, workforce development, funding priorities, and long-term investment in NZSL learning across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Image Acknowledgement

All illustrations used throughout this report are based on original drawings from the NZSL Dictionary and are used with permission from Te Herenga Waka - Victoria University of Wellington. The illustrations have been adapted using AI-assisted design tools to support teaching, accessibility, and visual presentation. We acknowledge the University and the original creators of these illustrations.



Glossary

Deaf Community	A cultural and linguistic community of Deaf people who share NZSL, Deaf culture, values, experiences, and social connections.
Deaf Culture	A shared set of values, traditions, language, and social practices within the Deaf community. Deaf culture is centred on the use of sign language (such as NZSL), visual communication, and a strong sense of community and identity.
Deaf Gain	A concept that recognises the unique strengths, perspectives, and contributions that Deaf people bring to society. Rather than viewing deafness as a deficit, Deaf Gain highlights the positive cultural, linguistic, and social value of Deaf people and Deaf communities, including the use of visual ways of communicating, learning, and engaging with the world.
Deaf-led	Refers to organisations, businesses, initiatives, or projects that are directed, managed, or guided by Deaf people and Deaf community leadership.
Immersion	An NZSL learning environment where participants communicate primarily through NZSL over an extended period of time to strengthen language development, confidence, and cultural understanding.
NZSL	New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is one of the official languages of Aotearoa New Zealand and the natural language of the Deaf community in New Zealand.
NBN	NZSL Business Network (NBN) is a collective network of Deaf-led NZSL businesses and leaders working collaboratively to strengthen NZSL services, workforce development, and business sustainability across Aotearoa New Zealand.
NZSL Hub	A proposed community-based model designed to increase visibility, accessibility, and everyday use of NZSL through local learning spaces, community activities, and Deaf-led engagement opportunities.
NZSL Tutor	A person who teaches New Zealand Sign Language and often provides education about Deaf culture, accessibility, and visual communication.
NZSLTA	New Zealand Sign Language Teachers Association (NZSLTA) is the national professional association supporting NZSL tutors, teaching standards, registration, and professional development.

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On the behalf of NZSL Business Network (NBN)