

AUT

A FUTURE IN  
**NEW ZEALAND SIGN  
LANGUAGE (NZSL) &  
INTERPRETING**



## WHAT IS NEW ZEALAND SIGN LANGUAGE (NZSL) & INTERPRETING?

New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) is one of New Zealand's two official languages, alongside Te Reo Māori. It is crucial for Deaf people to be able to access a sign language interpreter whenever they come into contact with hearing people who do not sign.

NZSL interpreters play an essential role in providing access to information for Deaf people and opening up opportunities for Deaf people to have a voice and contribute equally in society. NZSL interpreters are also advocates and intermediaries for people who work constructively with the Deaf community.

The job of an NZSL interpreter is to convey people's talk, without changing, omitting, or adding information. NZSL and English are grammatically very different, so the interpreter needs to first understand the meaning of the talk, and then they convey that meaning in a grammatically clear structure in the other language – interpreting does not happen on a word-by-word basis.

Since NZSL was recognised as an official language of New Zealand in 2006, there has been a steady increase in the need for qualified sign interpreters, particularly if they have a good understanding of professional terminology in areas such as health, education, law and social services.

If you love languages and working with people, want to increase your language acquisition in English and NZSL, are a problem solver and comfortable in all environments with people of all ages and ethnicities, then this could be a great career path for you.





## OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

Most countries have their own national sign language. NZSL is used daily by more than 20,235 New Zealanders. Many are hearing signers, such as interpreters, friends and family of Deaf people.

### Qualified NZSL interpreters open up communication

Since NZSL was recognised as an official language of New Zealand in 2006, there has been a steady increase in the need and use of qualified NZSL interpreters. For example, New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern regularly appears with sign language interpreters (most of whom are AUT graduates) who regularly deal with the complexities of conveying government issues, such as Covid updates, on a daily basis.

### Te Reo Māori interpreters in demand

Interpreters who are fluent in Te Reo Māori (as well as NZSL and English) are needed to help the Māori Deaf community better connect with their whānau, marae, tikanga and whakapapa. There are not yet enough interpreters for these settings in New Zealand, so AUT strongly encourages students who speak Te Reo Māori to learn NZSL and develop trilingual interpreting skills. AUT has scholarships for Māori and Pacific students.

### Dedicated government funds for NZSL

NZSL is one of the few sign languages in the world with dedicated government funding towards the language's promotion and maintenance. This is done through the NZSL Advisory Board, a national entity that provides a focal point of expertise, reference and support, including advice about NZSL as an official language, and funding for research projects and Deaf community initiatives.

### Barriers to health services

Multiple barriers for Deaf people accessing health services in New Zealand were highlighted in a 2017 AUT research project, *Deaf health stories* (funded by the NZSL Board). Barriers included poor attitudes amongst health practitioners, lack of awareness of Deaf culture, and inconsistent interpreter booking practices. Deaf participants in the study explained how crucial NZSL interpreters are in allowing them to access information so they can make informed decisions about their own health.

### Training needed for Deaf interpreters

Deaf people who grew up with NZSL as a first language (native signers) sometimes also work as Deaf interpreters to mediate communication between two different varieties of sign language, or between a written and a signed language. Deaf interpreters often work in a team with hearing interpreters. As yet, no training or employment structure exists for Deaf interpreters in New Zealand, although this may change in the future.

## WORK SETTINGS

Most New Zealand interpreters are self-employed. Work opportunities fluctuate throughout the year with less opportunity over the school break of December to February. NZSL interpreters work in a range of diverse environments providing access to interpreting for any situation where a Deaf person needs information in NZSL.

**Healthcare interpreting:** Involves interpreting for Deaf patients or their families in any healthcare situation, including hospitals. Sessions could range from GP appointments and antenatal classes to surgical procedures needing informed consent forms, as well as mental health settings.

**Legal interpreting:** Includes any situation from court rooms and police stations to lawyer appointments.

**Educational interpreting:** Involves interpreting from new entrant level to tertiary classes. Interpreters work in classes interpreting lectures and lessons, and ensuring communication during discussions and group work. The Ministry of Education provides scholarships for students interested in training as interpreters and then working in education settings. All staff working in Deaf education need to know NZSL and have a good understanding of Deaf culture, whether as teachers, teacher aides or residential service staff.



**Video/video remote interpreting:** Based in a call centre to mediate calls between Deaf and hearing people throughout the country, **video interpreters** facilitate the booking of appointments, chat with relatives, order goods, or access services. **Video remote interpreting** is often used where on-site interpreters are not available. This role covers a wide range of settings including medical appointments, work meetings, bank meetings, or parent-teacher interviews.

**General public:** Includes social gatherings such as funerals, weddings, political rallies, protest marches, disasters. For example, following the Christchurch mosque shootings, interpreters worked with media to keep the Deaf community of Christchurch updated and informed. Public events and meetings are also increasingly live streamed.

**Social service:** Involves interpreting for clients of Work and Income, Oranga Tamariki, Housing NZ and social workers.

**Performance interpreting:** Includes interpreting of music, theatre, comedy festivals, as well as interpreting shows for Deaf children.

**Business settings:** Attends meetings with employees to provide access to discussions and professional presentations. Attends professional conferences where a high standard of professional conduct and the ability to work under pressure is paramount. Some interpreters travel to interpret for tourism or business groups.

**Service coordination:** Employment consultants help Deaf people into work. Youth advisors work with Deaf youth, community relations advisors work in communities. Trainers run workplace programmes teaching staff how to provide a Deaf-friendly business and achieve positive experiences for current and potential Deaf customers/clients.

**Other:** There are also a number of mainstream careers where people's ability to do their job is enhanced by knowledge of NZSL and Deaf culture, including teachers, health educators, mental health experts, counsellors, social workers and community service coordinators. NZSL is a compulsory requirement in educational settings specifically for Deaf people.

## EXPECTED EARNINGS

NZSL interpreters usually work through booking agencies, invoicing fortnightly or monthly, and taking responsibility for their own tax. They are generally paid on an hourly basis as casual/or permanent part-time employees. A new graduate can expect to earn around \$45 an hour before tax. Hours vary depending on the contracts available. Sometimes interpreting work needs to be supplemented by other work.

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication (mid-2019) and should only be used as a guide.

## SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

First-year students do not need to have experience of NZSL as they will learn NZSL within the degree. Once qualified, however, NZSL graduates should demonstrate the following:

- Bilingual with an excellent command of English and NZSL; or trilingual (NZSL/Te Reo Māori/English) for those wishing to work with the Māori Deaf community
- Understand the interpreting process and how to apply the SLIANZ Code of Ethics in a wide variety of settings

- Understands healthcare, education and medical terminology and capable of researching new areas as needed
- Fluently interprets between spoken and signed languages simultaneously (while person is speaking) or consecutively (after person has spoken)
- Collaborative, self-starting, professional persona

## PERSONAL QUALITIES

- Has an affinity with the Deaf community
- Approachable and adaptable
- Interested in people of all ages and cultures
- Skilled communicator, empathetic and caring
- Comfortable in a diverse range of settings
- A problem solver who enjoys challenges
- Strong interest in languages

## UNIQUE TO AUT

AUT is the only tertiary institution in New Zealand where you can complete a degree majoring in New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and Deaf Studies or NZSL – English Interpreting.

The NZSL and Deaf Studies major is unique within Australasia. Both programmes are suitable for beginners (new to NZSL) as well as those who already sign.

Immersion into the Deaf culture is fostered through AUT having a close relationship with the Deaf community.

Through the Sign Language Interpreters Association of New Zealand (SLIANZ), AUT students can join the Tuakana Teina mentoring programme in their final year. A tuakana (experienced interpreter) external to the programme works collaboratively with and guides the student through their final year as well as the first two years after graduation.

## FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

Further study in language and culture is available at postgraduate certificate, diploma, master's and PhD level. AUT has a new Master of Language and Culture to offer advanced learning in NZSL and interpreting.

The NZSL programme team's research areas include sociolinguistics, NZSL linguistics, interpreting and translation, language teaching and learning.

## PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION

There is currently no professional accreditation for NZSL interpreters. The only accepted New Zealand qualification for working as an NZSL interpreter is AUT's NZSL – English Interpreting degree.





## REBEKAH GUY

Bachelor of Arts in New Zealand Sign Language – English Interpreting

NZSL-English Interpreter – freelance

“I love solving language problems and that is what you’re doing all the time as an interpreter. I do three days a week NZSL community interpreting as a contractor (via agencies) and two days a week educational interpreting as an employee of Kelston Deaf Education Centre (KDEC).

My first year after graduation I was lucky to be an intern for Connect, an interpreting agency. This gave me free supervision, mentoring and a welcoming network of experienced and skilled interpreters. It also gave me a weekly retainer that helped me financially while I was building up my networks.

This year I’m also doing a little educational (classroom-based) interpreting because I love working with young people.

Typically, I’d have four jobs in a day across Auckland. I have a very close relationship with my car! I’ve interpreted weddings, funerals, counselling sessions, school camps, church events, disability-related government forums... the list goes on.

I could be at the hospital early morning for a doctor’s rounds for a Deaf person, then at a work meeting for a Deaf professional, then maybe at the zoo interpreting a tour for Deaf children and at a council public meeting in the evening.

As a freelancer/contractor I tell my agency the hours I’m available and they book jobs for me. Each morning I check what is booked and off I go. It was a little hard to get used to initially, but now I quite like the spontaneity of it!

As an interpreter I feel privileged to move in and out of spaces that I might not usually inhabit. For example, I had my first marae experience as an interpreter. I’ve seen cataract surgery, and have been privy to family secrets aired at Oranga Tamariki meetings.

A big challenge is exposure to the daily ignorance, disrespect and systemic discrimination of the Deaf community. Every day I struggle with how much I should advocate and how much I should remain neutral/silent.”

## REBEKAH’S TIPS TO NEW GRADUATES

“Make sure your professional network is strong and supportive and includes other interpreters, agencies, and Deaf community members. Build those bonds while you’re still studying. It can be as simple as making friends and asking questions of people.

I certainly don’t consider myself a good networker, however I’m always curious about other people and keen to create bonds. It can be as simple as that!”



## USEFUL WEBSITES

### Deaf Aotearoa New Zealand

[www.deaf.org.nz](http://www.deaf.org.nz)

### Sign Language Interpreting Association of New Zealand (SLIANZ)

[www.slianz.org.nz](http://www.slianz.org.nz)

### Learn NZSL (free online resource)

[www.learnnzsl.nz](http://www.learnnzsl.nz)

### Teach Sign

[www.teachsign.org.nz](http://www.teachsign.org.nz)

## FURTHER INFORMATION


For the most up-to-date information on NZSL and Deaf Studies programmes, visit

[www.aut.ac.nz/sign-language](http://www.aut.ac.nz/sign-language)

### FUTURE STUDENTS

Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: [www.aut.ac.nz/enquire](http://www.aut.ac.nz/enquire)

[futurestudents@aut.ac.nz](mailto:futurestudents@aut.ac.nz)


 @AUTFutureStudents

### CURRENT AUT STUDENTS

Contact the Student Hub Advisors team for more information:

0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)

[www.aut.ac.nz/enquire](http://www.aut.ac.nz/enquire) | [studenthub@aut.ac.nz](mailto:studenthub@aut.ac.nz)

 @AUTEmployabilityandCareers

### EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS

For other Future Career Sheets visit:

[www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets](http://www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets)

For employability and career support, AUT students can book an appointment through

<https://elab.aut.ac.nz/>

### CITY CAMPUS

55 Wellesley Street East, Auckland Central

### CONNECT WITH US NOW



@autuni



@AUTuni



AUTUniversity



@autuni

The information contained in this career sheet is correct at time of printing, August 2019.

