



SLIANZ

Sign Language Interpreters Association of New Zealand
Te Rōpū o Ngā Kaiwhakamārama Reo Turi o Aotearoa

PO Box 6090
Wellesley Street
Auckland

Rebecca Hollingsworth
Senior Policy Advisor
Communications Policy; Building, Resources & Markets
Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment

via email: rebecca.hollingsworth2@mbie.govt.nz

15th April 2019

Dear Rebecca,

Thank you for inviting SLIANZ to provide feedback on proposed changes to the Telecommunications Relay Service, in particular to **Change 2: Make the Video Interpreting service more available**.

What follows is a summary of views expressed by myself on behalf of SLIANZ when I met with you in January 2019, and the views of SLIANZ members who took part in a consultation meeting with you via Zoom on 8th April 2019.

SLIANZ supports increased availability of the Video Interpreting Service (VIS) and acknowledges that the service has an important role to play in increasing access for the Deaf community. We would like to make it clear that in our view, video interpreting does not replace face-to-face interpreting and that an expansion of this service should not be at the cost of a reduction in face-to-face interpreting.

Background

VIS expansion has to be considered within the context of a relatively small pool of qualified NZSL interpreters. SLIANZ currently has approximately 100 - 110 qualified members; however, this membership includes many interpreters who only work part-time or who no longer actively interpret. The vast majority of interpreters are based in the main centres (Auckland, Christchurch and Wellington) and there is an acute shortage in some regions. The interpreter workforce is also predominantly female, which means a high proportion may have absences due to maternity leave. It also means that clients and settings where the preference would be to have a male interpreter can not always be accommodated. There is a

particular shortage of Māori and Pasifika interpreters who can interpret between NZSL and Te Reo Māori / Pasifika spoken languages.

There is no current registration system for NZSL interpreters, although a report on a review of interpreting standards was produced in 2017 (commissioned by the Office for Disability Issues and the NZSL Board - <https://www.odi.govt.nz/assets/NZSL/documents-nzsl/A-Review-of-NZSL-Interpreter-Standards-Report.pdf>). In the absence of a standards framework, there are concerns around quality assurance of interpreting services. The de facto standard for SLIANZ Ordinary Membership is the BA in NZSL Interpreting at AUT (and its predecessor, the Diploma in NZSL interpreting), which is currently the only training course for NZSL interpreters in the country.

VIS expansion - concerns and recommendations

SLIANZ notes the following issues with regard to the current VIS provision:

- restricted availability of the service in weekends and evenings - this is being resolved by the announcement of extended opening hours. However, it is envisaged that extended opening hours cannot be fulfilled just by the current 12 interpreters in the Auckland call centre.
- There is a need for continued promotion of the VIS to institutions such as hospitals, GP surgeries, IRD etc. This promotion cannot be done by interpreters themselves.
- Because all qualified interpreters are trained in Auckland and the only call centre is also in Auckland, there may be a lack of local knowledge and NZSL vocabulary specific to other regions.
- There has been the suggestion that with new technology, VIS could be provided by interpreters working from home. **SLIANZ does not currently support this proposal. We do see scope for setting up one or more additional call centres in different locations.**
 - Interpreters working in the current VIS recommend this approach because the presence of multiple interpreters in a call centre allows for support with difficult or lengthy jobs, supervision and training. There are some features unique to interpreting from video that require specific on-the-job training.
 - Call centres are also preferred because interpreters working in isolation from home may cause issues with maintaining confidentiality, maintaining a high quality of internet connection, having an ergonomic work environment, and minimising distractions during calls.
 - There are concerns around payment: if interpreters working from home would be paid per call, then this does not allow for professional development,

- preparation time, and investment in equipment needed to provide the service from home. Some interpreters might be tempted to work long hours.
- Quality assurance (both in terms of the video / connection quality and the quality of interpreting) would be difficult to maintain without supervision.
 - While some of these issues are not insurmountable in the long run, while the interpreting profession is still maturing and in the absence of standards, we see interpreters working from home as an unacceptable risk to the service.
- Deaf VIS users have stated that they would like to request particular preferred interpreters for some assignments. While it is acknowledged that this is desirable, due to rostering and work division in the call centre, and the need for interpreters to have set breaks, it may not always be possible to provide users with their preferred interpreter.
 - The current contract has meant that the VIS has been locked in to a dating technology. The Skype platform is also blocked by certain institutions (e.g. government departments and hospitals). Some users (e.g. older Deaf users) may have limited access to modern technology. Since technology is evolving at a rapid pace, it would be useful if a provider contract allowed for changes in technology during the term of the contract.
 - The current service call centre has been using the same equipment (headsets, desks, chairs etc.) since it was set up in 2011. At times interpreters working at the call centre have purchased their own replacements for faulty equipment. It is recommended that any future contracts include equipment maintenance and repairs as well as setup costs.

Kind regards,



President
president@slanz.org.nz
www.slanz.org.nz