



Deaf & Signing Ecosystem Policy

Supersedes the Auslan Endorsement System (2009)

Note: in this policy, where we refer to 'Deaf', we are referring to Deaf, Deafblind and hard of hearing people in Australia who use Auslan as their language of preference.

Background

This policy supersedes the Auslan Endorsement System (2009) – which provided endorsements to Auslan products according to two distinct categories. They can be viewed in the Annexes below.

Due to recent dialogue in the Deaf Community and a deeper understanding and wider community acceptance of the Deaf Ecosystem and its principles, Deaf Australia has decided to review the Auslan Endorsement System. The review has resulted in the decision to supersede the System and replace it with a Deaf and Signing Ecosystem Policy (*Deaf Ecosystem*). This is because the Auslan Endorsement System does not recognise Deaf signing people as the rightful keepers of Auslan.

Principles of the Deaf and Signing Ecosystem

- Equity is first and foremost the core of the Deaf Ecosystem. This includes:
 - **Intersectionality**, which includes and is not limited to, ethnicity (including First Nations), gender, LGBTQTI+, educational background, residential location, employment status, disabilities, and age, where all are recognised as equal of respect and included in the Deaf community.
 - **Social equity** where Deaf people can participate fully in their communities both Deaf and local.
 - **Educational equity** where fully informed pathways are provided to all including families with deaf children to access quality education in the most appropriate and preferred format.
 - **Workplace equity** where tools and resources create access and inclusion in the workplace.
 - **Economic equity** where finance, resources and economic empowerment are created in a way that is accessible and benefits many.
- Businesses and organisations are Deaf-owned and Deaf-led.
- Where Deaf related fields such as education and research into sign language, are concerned, work with Deaf expertise first and foremost.
- Where topics are up for debate, such as education for deaf children, work with Deaf expertise first and foremost.
- Collaborate with Deaf schools and organisations for Deaf people and children.

- Where hearing organisations are involved, Deaf people are equitable to hearing people – either as beneficiaries (using the social model), or as paid employees or contributors.

The Deaf and Signing Ecosystem

The Deaf Ecosystem is a tool where disadvantages many Deaf, Deafblind and hard of hearing individuals experience are addressed. Many Deaf, Deafblind and hard of hearing people are either under- or unemployed, often with their wealth and opportunities exploited by the larger societal structure firmly in place. This exploitation along with educational, social, economic and workplace barriers continue the disempowerment many face.

To actively remove these barriers, there is a requirement of economic, social and knowledge investment in the Deaf community; to be precise, its individuals, organisations and businesses.

Examples of exploitation:

- Hearing people create and sell Auslan resources.
- Hearing people establish a business that profits from Deaf people (e.g., interpreting services or NDIS provider).
- Deaf people work for a hearing organisation, but are not paid an appropriate or equitable wage.

There are many ways to do this. Some examples include but are not limited to:

- Using a Deaf-owned business, of which there are many
- Hiring Deaf professionals to provide a service to you or to your workplace
- Providing pro-bono or in-kind knowledge in an area of expertise that you have to Deaf people or organisations in a mentoring capacity or otherwise
- Supporting the Deaf community's initiatives
- Supporting advocacy movements such as lobbying for better access to interpreters on the political stage
- Providing support to the diverse members of the Deaf community
- Ensuring that you create a spotlight on the Deaf person when approached to speak to the media or publicly. In addition, declining to speak on the Deaf community's behalf, no matter your role or expertise (such as interpreting).

Such investment in the Deaf community will ensure a thriving and self-reliant community. Supporting each other in a collective effort creates a positive knock-on effect. It enables the Deaf community to develop healthy, productive and empowered members, which leads to educational, economic and social barriers being eradicated.

Deaf Australia's Position

Deaf Australia is active in their part of the Deaf Ecosystem, in that it collaborates with the Deaf community, pays for, and provides a platform of shared knowledge from a wide range of people in the Deaf community. This currently comes in four different formats: webinars, vodcasts, workshops and skill-share. The topics on offer are based on suggestions received from the Deaf community.

Procurement Strategy

When obtaining services or advice from people external to Deaf Australia, the following are the steps Deaf Australia will take, in consecutive order:

1. Deaf Australia obtains services or advice from the Deaf community in Australia.
2. Failing an appropriate Australian source, *and if funding allows*, Deaf Australia will source services or advice from Deaf people internationally.
3. Failing that, Deaf Australia will source services or advice from hearing people who are a part of the Deaf community (known as Deaf-Hearts).
4. If all else fails and there are no other opportunities left to explore, Deaf Australia will source services or advice from hearing people with no connection to the Deaf community.

The Deaf community is more powerful together as a force than as stand-alone individuals.

References

Convo: What is the Deaf Ecosystem and why should I care?

<https://support.convorelay.com/en/articles/1020856-what-is-the-deaf-ecosystem-and-why-should-i-care>

Deaf Australia: Deaf Ecosystem. <https://deafaustralia.org.au/deaf-ecosystem/>

Gallaudet University: Explore the Signing Ecosystem. <https://www.gallaudet.edu/signing-ecosystem/>

The Governor's Office of the Deaf & Hard of Hearing (Maryland): Deaf Ecosystem.

<https://odhh.maryland.gov/deaf-ecosystem/>

Date Approved	21 December 2021
Date of Commencement	21 December 2021
Amendment Date	
Date for Next Review	November 2022
Related Policy, Procedure and Guidelines	
Policy Superseded by this Policy	Auslan Endorsement System

Annex One



Auslan Endorsement System

Background

Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the language used by the Australian Deaf community. Auslan is not the same as sign languages used in other countries – different countries use different sign languages.

Research into Auslan is relatively new and ongoing, and authoritative information about Auslan based on research is limited, with much more research needing to be done.

Many materials are being published that claim to use and/or teach Auslan, many by people who are not native users of the language, and some of these materials use Auslan incorrectly. This is cause for concern to Deaf Australia.

There is indeed a need for more Auslan resources and Deaf Australia encourages Auslan authors to create more materials. However, the publication, promotion and sale of resources that use Auslan incorrectly does not help the user / learner, the Auslan language, or the Australian Deaf community whose language is Auslan.

In the absence of more definitive research, it is Deaf Australia's view that it is not appropriate for anyone to set themselves up as "the authority" on Auslan. However, there is a need for guidance in the use of Auslan in published materials, by those who know and use the language as their own.

To this end Deaf Australia has established this Auslan Endorsement System, which tests materials and if they meet the criteria, they will be endorsed by Deaf Australia. All of our testers are fluent users of Auslan with an in-depth knowledge of the language, the Deaf community and its culture (see the separate document that sets out the criteria Deaf Australia uses to select testers) but it must be acknowledged that in the absence of more definitive research, this system necessarily has an element of subjectivity.

Deaf Australia does, however, believe this is the best possible system that can be offered in the current situation. We urge authors to use it to ensure their materials are as accurate and faithful to Auslan as possible within our current knowledge.

We also urge all those who buy materials to buy Deaf Australia endorsed materials. If materials are not Deaf Australia endorsed, then when considering whether or not to purchase them special attention needs to be given to the material's author/s and their level of fluency and knowledge of Auslan and the community of people whose language it is.

Annex Two



Auslan Endorsement System

Criteria for Endorsement

To be endorsed by Deaf Australia, Auslan materials must meet the criteria set out below.

There are two categories of endorsement.

Category 1 – Materials that are considered by our testers to use correct Auslan signs and correct Auslan grammar.

Category 2 – Materials that are considered by our testers to use correct Auslan signs. The grammar is not considered to be Auslan.

Some materials (e.g. children's story books) use Auslan signs in English word order – i.e. the grammar is English. These materials are not fully authentically Auslan, but they can be useful for children learning English. It is important that these materials use correct Auslan signs. To be endorsed by Deaf Australia as using Auslan signs but having non-Auslan grammar these materials must meet the criteria set out in Category 2 below.

Category 1 – Auslan signs and grammar

Auslan is a visual language that moves in space, and as such it cannot be easily written down. (There is a writing system that linguists use, but most people do not know or understand it.) The most effective media for Auslan is film/CD/DVD – i.e. media that allow the movements and expressions of Auslan to be shown. Materials presented in these media have a better chance of being endorsed.

1. Many materials, e.g. books and websites, try to depict Auslan signs with the use of static drawings and photographs. Since these materials cannot adequately show the movement and non-manual features (e.g., expressions) of the signs, they need to include an explanation of how the signs move and the non-manual features. This explanation should either accompany each sign (e.g., as in a dictionary), or be included as a glossary. Auslan material taken from other sources should have appropriate copyright approval.
2. Materials that use static representations of Auslan signs should include advice to the user that these materials should only be used in conjunction with a face to face Auslan class, or with people who already know the signs; they are not suitable by themselves as a method for learning Auslan because the movement and non-manual features of the signs cannot be clearly shown in this format.
3. Signs must be acceptable to our testers for all of the 5 elements:
 - a) Handshape

- b) Orientation
- c) Location
- d) Movement
- e) Non- manual features (e.g., expression)

(Materials published before March 2008 and being tested retrospectively, will be accepted if they are considered accurate for all of the first 4 elements; new materials published from March 2008 must have all 5 elements that are acceptable to our testers.)

4. Signs must be considered to be understood everywhere in Australia. If they are not widely used nationally then the material needs to include a statement advising that it contains regional signs that are not used nation-wide.
5. For persons'/characters' names, unless the person/character has a pre-existing sign name, names should be fingerspelt in full, in line with Deaf customs.
6. Signs must be acceptable to our testers as being appropriate to the context.
7. Signers' delivery of signs should be age appropriate to the audience.
8. Photographs and illustrations of signers should be appropriate to the audience and the story – e.g., illustrations of child signers in children's books.

Category 2: Auslan signs; non-Auslan grammar

Materials that use representations of Auslan signs to accompany the English text, as in a children's story book with a sign attached to each word or group of words, are not fully Auslan materials because they depict Auslan signs in English word order. The grammatical structure of sentences is different in Auslan.

These materials will be endorsed as category 2 Auslan materials if they meet the criteria for category 1, but the grammar is English.

These materials should include a statement advising the user that although the signs themselves are Auslan signs they are used in English word order.

Annex Three



Auslan Endorsement System

Process of endorsement – new materials (pre-publication)

1. The author/producer sends materials to the Deaf Australia Brisbane office (see address below), accompanied by the standard test fee. The fee is \$275, to be made payable to Deaf Australia Inc.
2. Deaf Australia Brisbane sends the material to between two and four members of the Auslan Endorsement Team with a criteria checklist.
3. Each member of the team reviews the item and fills out the checklist. When completed, the material and the checklist are returned to the Deaf Australia Brisbane office.
4. If there are significant disagreements between testers, Deaf Australia Brisbane will ask the testers to discuss the material and arrive at an agreed position.
5. If the material meets the criteria, Deaf Australia Brisbane adds it to the list of endorsed Auslan materials on the Deaf Australia website, and sends it back to the author/producer with a form stating that it has been approved for endorsement by Deaf Australia, and an order form for the number of stickers required (artwork for inclusion of the stickers in the item can also be provided).
6. If the material does not meet the criteria, Deaf Australia Brisbane returns it to the author/producer with a form stating that it has not been approved, and brief information on which criteria it failed to meet. Authors/producers who wish to have a detailed review and report on how to change the material to meet the criteria will need to pay a further fee, to be determined depending on the extent of the work required.

Send materials for testing to:

**Deaf Australia Inc
PO Box 1083
Stafford Qld 4053**

Annex Four



Auslan Endorsement System

Criteria for selection as a member of the Auslan Endorsement Team

To be selected as a member of the Auslan Endorsement team, each individual should meet criteria 1 plus at least another three of the following criteria:

7. Be a native (i.e., should have been using Auslan since before the age of 7 years) or near-native Auslan user.
8. Preferably be from a Deaf family that uses Auslan.
9. Preferably has experience in teaching Auslan.
10. Has a good understanding of sign linguistics.
11. Has a good understanding of/ability to translate from Auslan to English and vice versa, including good fluency in English.
12. Understands and accepts that like all languages, Auslan, its signs and how they are used, is constantly changing.