

## OVERVIEW

*As a native user of Auslan, and as an advocate for the language and for the Deaf community, I am thrilled to see a national curriculum in Auslan come to fruition. For the first time, deaf children will have access to a formal first language learner pathway for acquiring Auslan, acknowledging their status and strengths as visual learners, and offering a ‘Deaf gain’ perspective to their lives. In turn, the second language learner pathway provides unparalleled opportunities for hearing children to access and use Auslan in their schools and in society, reducing barriers for participation and increasing equality in the wider community. Children learning Auslan in schools have the potential to fundamentally change the social fabric of Australia.*

***Drisana Levitzke-Gray, Deaf advocate and Young Australian of the Year (2015)***

## Introduction

Auslan is the language of the Deaf<sup>1</sup> community of Australia. Auslan is an acronym for Australian Sign Language. Auslan and other signed languages around the world are legitimate languages that are visual-gestural in nature. They have a complete set of linguistic structures, and are complex and highly nuanced.

Signed languages evolve naturally in Deaf communities, where signers use mutually agreed signs and ways of ordering them to communicate with each other. Signed languages have their own grammar and lexicon – not based on the spoken language of the country or region, although influenced by them.

Signed languages fulfil the same functions as spoken languages in meeting the cognitive and social needs of a group of human beings. However, the modality of a visual-gestural language like Auslan, and an aural-oral language like English, is markedly different. Thus, although signed and spoken languages share many linguistic principles, the visual-gestural modality results in some unique features of signed languages not found in spoken languages.

There are many different signed languages around the world, some of which can be grouped into ‘language families’. The signed language used by the Australian Deaf community is Auslan, which belongs to the BANZSL family of signed languages. This includes the British, Australian, and New Zealand Sign Languages, which all share a similar lexicon and grammar. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia have their own signed languages; however, these are mostly gestural representations of spoken languages rather than languages of deaf communities.

Auslan can be traced back to the arrival of Europeans in Australia in the late 1700s, with British Sign Language (BSL) users arriving in Australia as convicts and as free settlers. Although now considered a relatively young language in its own right rather than just a dialect of BSL, the ancestral link Auslan shares with the BANZSL group means it is a member of one of the oldest continuing signed language families in the world.

## Recognition of Auslan

The Deaf community has a rich history and culture; however, the signed languages of deaf people have not always been recognised as legitimate languages. Due in part to the modality of signed languages, they have inaccurately been viewed as a form of pantomime, or as a manual representation of ‘broken English’, and incapable of the same kind of sophistication as spoken languages. Furthermore, because no widely accepted or standardised orthographic writing system exists for Auslan, the Deaf community has faced a barrier to capturing

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<sup>1</sup> In referring to deaf people who belong to a linguistic and cultural minority known as the Deaf community, the ‘D’ may be capitalised in reference to the individual, the culture or the group to accord respect and deference, for example, Deaf teacher. This is similar to being referred to as Aboriginal people, or members of the Macedonian community living in Australia. When referring simply to audiological status of a group, that is, deaf children, the lower case ‘d’ as in ‘deaf’ is the more common usage.

and recording its language in efforts to legitimise it. Although there are recently developed 'sign writing' or 'gloss' systems that sign linguists, teachers and researchers have developed to be able to record and document signs, Auslan has no written form in the traditionally understood sense of a writing system.

The United States of America is widely acknowledged for pioneering signed language research and the formal development of signed language teaching programs. Starting in the 1960s, the first sign linguistics research is credited to William Stokoe. The United Kingdom and parts of Europe followed suit in the 1970s, and Australia a little later in the 1980s. Auslan was first officially recognised as a legitimate language by the Australian Government in 1987 in a government white paper on the languages of Australia.

Recent developments in digital recording and software for time-aligned multimedia annotations have allowed for the improved documentation and analysis of much larger data sets of signed languages. These tools now allow Auslan data – along with the rich culture of Australian deaf people – to be captured and recorded in various ways. As a result, linguists, in consultation with the Deaf community, are increasingly conducting research on signed languages and encouraging the documentation of Auslan and other signed languages.

Societal attitudes have changed towards Auslan and deaf people. As usage has been documented, scholarly research published, and dictionaries developed, policies now legitimise the use of Auslan, and interest has grown in teaching and learning the language in formal education settings. Recognition of Auslan in the Australian Curriculum therefore has significant historic value, and is to be celebrated.

## The place of Auslan in Australian education

Around the nation, the use of Auslan in schools for deaf children has been varied and inconsistent in the past.

However, the recognition and improved status of Auslan in recent years has changed the educational landscape for deaf children. For example, the move from segregated school settings for deaf children to mainstream school environments has influenced community and education sector interest in Auslan in recent years. Auslan has been increasingly embraced in deaf schools and in mainstream school settings where deaf students may be placed.

In addition, between 1980 and 1990, many civil and political events around the world altered the circumstances of the Australian Deaf community. Advocacy by various groups, including deaf people, brought about legislative and social change in Australia, including the *Disability Discrimination Act* in 1992, as well as Acts regarding telecommunications access and television captioning.

Official government recognition of Auslan, and the implementation of relevant education and employment legislation arising from the aforementioned advocacy, led to changes in society, empowering deaf people to take up further studies and to enter previously inaccessible occupations. These shifts also had an immeasurable impact on the perception of Auslan in the wider community, with increased enrolment of second language learners in tertiary-level Auslan classes for adults, and the establishment of nationwide Auslan interpreter training programs from 1986.

The availability and increased profile of Auslan in primary and secondary schools for second language learners has, however, been less rapid, despite interest and demand for the language in schools. Historically, many schools that have provided some type of teaching and learning in Auslan have offered lunchtime or hobby/interest classes rather than a formal course on a school timetable grid alongside spoken languages and other subjects.

Victoria has been a leading exception; it developed a formal curriculum for use at Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) level in 1994. Other states followed suit over time, with Auslan now formally available in several schools in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, most notably. A national agreement via the Collaborative Curriculum and Assessment Framework for Languages (CCAFL) exists for the formal study of Auslan in Year 11 and Year 12. This national syllabus was developed under the auspices of CCAFL in 2002 and is available for endorsed use by each state and territory authority.

Inconsistency across Australia in the provision of formal Auslan teaching for second language learners in schools F–10, and the absence of any first language learner Auslan curriculum to date, means this dual-pathway national curriculum will systematise Auslan teaching and learning, and for Auslan is groundbreaking.

This national curriculum will help systematise Auslan provision in Australian schools, serving both deaf and hearing student populations. This curriculum rightfully acknowledges the place of Auslan and the culture of the Deaf community in Australian society by including it in the Australian education system. This is reinforced by offering access to Auslan, and formal study of it, by deaf children in a school setting accessing Auslan as a first

language learner pathway, and by also offering Auslan as a second language for those students interested in learning it as an additional language.

*When I was a school student, we were punished for using our sign language. I remember writing 100 times: 'I must not sign'. It makes me so happy to see that young people today are encouraged to learn Auslan, and to be proud of it.*

**Nola Colefax, OAM, Deaf Elder**

## Rationale

Formally studying Auslan contributes to the overall intellectual and social enrichment of first language (L1) and second language (L2) learners of Auslan. The study of Auslan gives learners insight into the rich cultural heritage of the Deaf community. Learning Auslan provides students with a distinctive means of understanding the diverse society in which they live, and increases their appreciation of difference and engagement with the Deaf community. More broadly, learning Auslan develops intercultural capability, understanding and respect for others, and encourages an openness to different perspectives and experiences.

This curriculum provides direction for an integrated, inclusive and meaningful approach to language education in Auslan for both first and second language learners.

*As a parent of one deaf child and five hearing children, I have been lobbying for an Auslan curriculum in schools for years. A recently implemented course at my sons' school has changed our world as a family. Learning Auslan formally as a second language means my sons can now not only communicate with their deaf brother, but even argue with him and share jokes! For my deaf son, being able to access a first language learning pathway in Auslan will mean everything. It will touch every subject and alter the trajectory of his life. It is that profound. A child armed with language can change the world, and deaf children will have a real chance at succeeding equally to their hearing peers if able to master their first language through recognised formal study of it in school. This is simply revolutionary.*

**Lesley Klem, hearing parent of a deaf child**

### Rationale for first language learners

This curriculum will provide deaf children with access to education in and about their own language. Education systems can play an important role in facilitating access to language learning and supporting language vitality. Learning Auslan meets the need of young deaf people to formally learn about their own language and recognises the significance of Auslan in the linguistic landscape of Australia. Learning Auslan in a formal sense can play an important part in the development of a strong sense of self-esteem and identity for deaf students. Learning in and about their own language is crucial to the overall learning and achievements of deaf students. It enables them to develop a wider recognition and understanding of their language, culture and identity, and this contributes to their psychological wellbeing, as well as to their academic development.

### Rationale for second language learners

Today, many deaf children are educated in inclusive school settings raising the profile of Auslan. This occurs in these school settings where classroom educational interpreters, also referred to as learning support officers or educational assistants, perform an interpreting function with some deaf children. Deaf students are increasingly present in schools, creating a need for a wider range of communication partners among their peer group, as not all interactions can or should be mediated by an interpreting practitioner. One of the key reasons for introducing Auslan in schools, therefore, is for humanistic purposes, to increase opportunities for interaction between deaf children and their hearing peers, and to reduce barriers to communication. Through learning Auslan, L2 learners gain access to knowledge and understanding of the nature and purpose of human languages and the use of a different language modality. In addition, from a vocational perspective, the greater participation of deaf people in society in a diverse range of occupations, and in the breadth of community spheres, creates possibilities for future career and personal fulfilment for L2 learners of Auslan. In general, learning Auslan as a second language enables students to engage meaningfully with a different language and culture, thereby enhancing their understanding of their own language and culture. Such intercultural learning is essential in the increasingly diverse and changing contexts in which we live and work.

### For all learners

Learning Auslan:

- deepens all students' understanding that each language is an integrated, evolving system for the framing and communication of meaning. Students understand the role of language as an expression of cultural and personal identity and a shaper of perspectives.

- contributes within the curriculum by providing distinctive real-life and intellectual opportunities for students to expand their engagement with the wider world and to reflect on the cultural and social assumptions that underpin their own world view and their language use. Such awareness of different perspectives is an integral part of effective communication.
- contributes to the development of critical thinking and the ability to adapt to change. It equips students with learning strategies and study habits that are the foundation not only for lifelong learning but also for any subsequent language learning.

The opportunity to learn Auslan formally is becoming available in an increasing number of Australian schools, and an aim of this national curriculum is to make this learning opportunity accessible in a systematic manner to even more students around Australia. Language learning is life enhancing, and with this national curriculum, all Australian students have the opportunity to benefit from the social, cultural, intellectual and emotional development that will result from learning the unique and sophisticated visual-gestural language of the Australian Deaf community.

## Aims

The Australian Curriculum: Languages – Auslan aims to develop the knowledge, understanding and skills to ensure students:

- communicate in Auslan
- understand language, culture and learning and their relationship, and thereby develop an intercultural capability in communication
- understand themselves as communicators
- develop a knowledge and an understanding of the diversity of Deaf experience and the nature of identity.

These aims are interrelated and provide the basis for two organising strands for learning Auslan: Communicating and Understanding.

## Learning Auslan

Some linguistic features of Auslan are similar to properties found in spoken languages, and others are not. For example, the 26 fingerspelled letters of the Auslan alphabet are based on the 26 letters of English. The occasional contact Auslan has with English such as in relation to mouthing – the use of lip patterns when signing – or fingerspelling, may support the early stages of learning Auslan for some L2 students, as might the apparent visual motivation of some signs. Although indigenous to the Australian Deaf community, Auslan shares some properties with other signed languages, which can make additional signed languages relatively easy to acquire once learners are fluent in Auslan.

## Benefits

Learning Auslan increases the capacity to communicate with peers, friends and family members who may use Auslan, as well as improving capacity for visual-gestural communication more broadly. It also provides intellectual interest and personal challenge to learners, integrating cross-curriculum opportunities, with ICT in particular. It offers students alternative ways to express their thoughts, and reinforces social justice values. Learning Auslan increases social networks, interpersonal skills, and participation in diversity, offering a particular appreciation of the notion of Deafhood, an understanding of cultural identity, and community membership. Learning Auslan increases intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for inclusion, and provides students with learning that is to an extent portable, in terms of learning strategies for communication and gesture that may have international application. Also, learning Auslan allows deaf students to learn more about their L1 and helps them to better understand and acquire an L2, enhancing the development of literacy. Acquiring a visual-gestural language provides L2 learners with a unique language learning experience and helps them to better understand their L1. It also may provide an accessible L2 learning opportunity for non-traditional learners, students with disabilities and those who are visual learners.

## The diversity of learners

### Pathways and learner background

There is diversity in the background of learners of Auslan. Learners may be deaf or hearing, and may be learning Auslan as a first language or as a second language. To cater for distinct learner backgrounds, the Auslan curriculum has two pathways:

- First Language (L1) Learner Pathway
- Second Language (L2) Learner Pathway.

The rationale for providing an L1 pathway is that deaf children do not usually have an opportunity to formally learn their first language in a classroom context. Such exploration and development of their L1 affords these students a more sophisticated understanding of their L1, scaffolding their acquisition of their L2 (English).

The L1 pathway typically caters for deaf students whose native language is Auslan (that is, deaf children of deaf adults, or deaf children from hearing families who use Auslan at home); and deaf students who are introduced to Auslan in the early school years, for whom it is a highly accessible language and likely to be their future preferred or primary language. This latter group of deaf children might not have access to Auslan at home. Developing a strong L1 via this pathway from Foundation to Year 10 will increase the educational capabilities of deaf children, encourage functional bilingualism in Auslan and English, and will improve learning and future employment opportunities for these children.

An additional group of students who would still be considered L1 learners are deaf children who are not exposed to Auslan at home or school for a variety of reasons until entering secondary school. These deaf children are very late L1 learners if they do not have proficiency in any other signed language, or in a spoken or written language, such as English, and therefore they do not have an L1 on which to build their learning of Auslan. Their L1 is not established, and they are therefore entering into formal L1 learning of Auslan in Years 7–10 for the first time. This group of late L1 learners is catered for in the Years 7–10 (Year 7 Entry) sequence of the L1 pathway.

The L2 pathway typically caters for students who are not members of the Deaf community. Typically, this will mean hearing students learning Auslan as a second or additional language. It may also include deaf or hard of hearing children already fluent in another language, such as a different signed language in the case of a recent immigrant, or spoken English for some deaf children who have residual hearing, or access to speech. These children are being introduced to Auslan for the first time as an additional language to add to their existing linguistic repertoire.

Due to a range of complex factors, it is recognised that these two pathways may not be able to meet the learning needs of all students. For example, native signers of Auslan who are hearing (such as hearing children from deaf families) may not be adequately accounted for in an L1 pathway, nor do they easily fit into an L2 pathway. In addition, a deaf migrant already fluent in a native signed language from another country may not be entirely suited to an L2 pathway for Auslan as so many age-appropriate L1 features and linguistic competencies will already be present in his/her use of another signed language, making a second signed language very easy to learn. Congenitally deafblind children, or other students with disabilities, may also present unique challenges with regard to the language learning pathways.

Ultimately, however, this dual-pathway approach recognises that the key variable in the language learning experience is the diversity of the learners. It acknowledges that students bring specific backgrounds, diverse linguistic and cultural experience, individual knowledge and skills to their learning of Auslan, and that the programming in schools by teachers will need to reflect this, differentiating for learner diversity accordingly and drawing on the L1 or the L2 pathway as appropriate.

### First Language Learner Pathway (L1)

Due to interruption in intergenerational transmission of Auslan, L1 learners will be more varied than is typically found in other languages. The L1 pathway is pitched at two of the many types of learners in the Auslan cohort:

- native signing children from Deaf families who have fluent language models to interact with at home and have been exposed to the language since birth

- deaf children from hearing families with parents or older relatives who have learnt to sign and have exposed their children early to rich signing models, such as in bilingual preschools.

There is another significant group of children in the L1 pathway: delayed Auslan users – children who arrive in a signing program in their first few years of schooling. These students begin learning Auslan with limited prior experience of any language and may have additional disabilities that are hidden because of their language delay.

The population of children who will follow the L1 pathway therefore has great variation in Auslan skill levels. Some learners will have had extensive access to a range of mature language users in early learning programs, in school and perhaps at home, where families embrace learning Auslan. Others will have limited quantity and quality of input in Auslan at home and sometimes even in school, and may not have attended a signing program prior to school. The L1 pathway is primarily pitched at those students with exposure to Auslan prior to Foundation level; delayed language learners will require extra support to participate in the learning experiences.

Typically, L1 programs occur with constant involvement from a variety of fluent signers drawn from the Deaf community. A key expectation in the L1 pathway is that students will have opportunities to interact with elders and the Deaf community to consolidate and enhance their learning of the language and culture.

For L1 learners, having the opportunity to formally study Auslan at school is powerful recognition of the value and status of their language. Learning Auslan also helps strengthen their identity and the impact of this is healthier self-esteem, greater resilience, better mental health, an improved concept of self and a greater engagement with language, community and culture. In addition, formal learning of their L1 may give deaf students increased opportunity to develop understanding, knowledge and valuable life skills across the curriculum.

L1 students develop language capability to expand domains of use in their first language. This includes developing skills in registers and genres not necessarily encountered in their home context, which will particularly be the case for delayed L1 learners of Auslan.

This pathway enhances essential skills that underpin other learning, including critical thinking and literacy in both Auslan and in English.

L1 students will learn to reflect on their own identities as communicators and become more aware of the values and beliefs that underpin their communication practices. They will explore ways in which they express their identity in Auslan and in Deaf culture, and how this can be extended to English and other languages and cultures.

L1 students develop an understanding of the systems of Auslan and sociolinguistic variation in context. They engage in translation and interpretation activities that provide insight into the cultural and linguistic differences and similarities between Auslan and English. They develop an awareness of communicative practices and how they differ between the two languages.

L1 students reflect on their linguistic environment at a local, regional, national and international level, exploring the situation of Auslan and other signed languages. They explore ways in which Auslan can be expanded to meet the needs of their own developing linguistic and cultural capabilities and their identity as a member of the Deaf community. Students grow in their understanding of the history of deaf people and of their own ability to effect positive social change.

## Second Language Learner Pathway (L2)

An L2 pathway gives students the opportunity to learn a language in addition to any other language(s) they already use.

The first language of most L2 students will be a spoken language, and this pathway allows them to study a language that is very different from a spoken language and comes from a culture quite distinct from the hearing mainstream culture. This develops a deeper appreciation of the nature and diversity of languages and cultures, and requires the acquisition of knowledge and skills necessary to learn and understand Auslan and its cultural context.

Students learn to apply their developing knowledge of Auslan to interact with others and communicate personal information and ideas in a widening range of contexts. By observing and interacting with Auslan users and Auslan texts, students begin to recognise the culture-specific ways in which communication takes place. They also develop awareness of their own linguistic and cultural practices and begin to apply this new understanding in their communication with others.

If L2 learners are learning in a school attended by deaf students, they will have a unique opportunity to use their new language on a daily basis in an authentic context. Deaf students located in schools that offer an L2 Auslan program have increased opportunity to expand their peer networks, potentially supporting transition between schools (from primary to secondary, for example), and increasing their social networks and feelings of inclusion.

Students learn about new developments in Auslan, such as new signed vocabulary, as technology and the language evolve. They also learn about cultural trends and developments in the context of national and international Deaf communities and signed languages.

## Developing teaching and learning

### Sequences of learning

The Australian Curriculum: Languages – Auslan has two learning sequences: one from Foundation to Year 10, and another from Year 7 to Year 10 (Year 7 Entry). The curriculum is written in a series of bands, as follows: Foundation – Year 2, Years 3–4, Years 5–6, Years 7–8 and Years 9–10. Given the limited but growing research foundation and pedagogical evidence for the teaching and learning of Auslan, there may be local flexibility in curriculum implementation, depending on suitability of learner pathway and entry point in the sequence.

### Strands and sub-strands

The content of the Australian Curriculum: Languages is organised through two interrelated strands, which realise the three aims. The two strands are:

- *Communicating*: using language for communicative purposes in interpreting, creating and exchanging meaning
- *Understanding*: analysing language and culture as a resource for interpreting and creating meaning.

The strands reflect three important aspects of language learning:

1. communication
2. analysis of aspects of language and culture
3. reflection, which involves
  - a. reflection on the experience of communicating
  - b. reflection on comparative dimensions of the languages available in students' repertoires, for example, the first language in relation to the second language and self in relation to others.

A set of sub-strands has been identified within each strand, which reflects dimensions of language use and the related content to be taught and learnt. The strands and sub-strands do not operate in isolation but are integrated in relation to language use for different purposes in different contexts. The relative contribution of each sub-strand differs for described languages, pathways and bands of learning.

Table 1 provides a brief description of each of the strands and sub-strands for Auslan.

**Table 1: Relationship between strands and sub-strands for Auslan**

<b>Strand</b>	<b>Sub-strand</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>Communicating</b> <i>Using language for communicative purposes in interpreting, creating and exchanging meaning</i>	1.1 Socialising	Interacting to exchange, ideas, opinions, experiences, thoughts and feelings; and participating in planning, negotiating, deciding and taking action
	1.2 Informing	Obtaining, processing, interpreting and conveying information through a range of Auslan texts; developing and applying knowledge
	1.3 Creating	Engaging with imaginative experience by participating in, responding to and creating a range of texts, such as stories, poetry, art and performance
	1.4 Translating	Moving between languages and cultures, recognising different interpretations and explaining these to others
	1.5 Identity	Exploring and expressing their sense of identity as individuals and as members of the Deaf community and culture or as hearing people
	1.6 Reflecting	Participating in intercultural exchange, questioning reactions and assumptions; and considering how interaction shapes communication and identity
<b>Understanding</b> <i>Analysing and understanding language and culture as resources for interpreting and shaping meaning in intercultural exchange</i>	2.1 Systems of language	Understanding the language system, including visual-spatial language parameters, conventions and grammar
	2.2 Language variation and change	Understanding how language use varies according to individual difference and context, and across time and place
	2.3 Language awareness	Analysing and understanding language and culture over time, including language policy, language rights, international contexts and language vitality
	2.4 The role of language and culture	Analysing and understanding the role of language and culture in the exchange of meaning

The sub-strands are further differentiated according to a set of ‘threads’ that support the internal organisation of content in each sub-strand. These threads (shown in Table 2) are designed to capture (1) range and variety in the scope of learning and (2) a means for expressing the progression of content across the learning sequences.

Table 2: Strands, sub-strands and threads for Auslan across the learner pathways

Strand	Sub-strand	Thread	
		L1	L2
Communicating	1.1 Socialising	Socialising and interacting	Socialising and interacting
		Taking action	Taking action
		The language and associated protocols of Auslan learning	The language and associated protocols of Auslan learning
	1.2 Informing	Obtaining and using information	Obtaining and using information
		Conveying and presenting information	Conveying and presenting information
	1.3 Creating	Participating in and responding to imaginative experience	Participating in and responding to imaginative experience
		Creating and expressing imaginative experience	Creating and expressing imaginative experience
	1.4 Translating	Translating/interpreting and explaining	Translating/interpreting and explaining
		Creating and using bilingual resources	Creating and using bilingual resources
	1.5 Identity	Relationships and community	Expressing and reflecting identity
		Place and space	
		Roles and responsibilities	
	1.6 Reflecting	Reflecting on the experience of intercultural communication	Reflecting on the experience of intercultural communication
	Understanding	2.1 Systems of language	The formational elements of signs
Sign modifications			Sign modifications
Sign classes and clause structures			Sign classes and clause structures
Text organisation			Text organisation
2.2 Language variation and change		Variation in language use	Variation in language use
2.3 Language awareness		Linguistic landscape and the nature of Auslan	Linguistic landscape and the nature of Auslan
		Language vitality	Language vitality

Strand	Sub-strand	Thread	
		L1	L2
	2.4 The role of language and culture	The relationship between language and culture	The relationship between language and culture

## Text types

Text types include signed or spoken texts, written texts (in English), digital texts and multimodal texts. They are central to curriculum development as all work in language learning can be seen as textual work. The selection of quality Auslan texts produced by native or native-like signers is important: texts define and reflect past and present and linguistic and cultural identity, making the people and experiences of a particular culture distinctive; they also provide the opportunity for intercultural understanding.

## Band descriptions

The band descriptions provide a general description of language learning that is typical at particular year levels along the F–10 continuum. They have been developed to correspond to learning in the following bands: Foundation – Year 2, Years 3–4, Years 5–6, Years 7–8 and Years 9–10. Each band description includes discussion of:

- nature of the learner
- Auslan language learning and use
- contexts of interaction
- texts and resources
- features of Auslan language use
- level of support
- the role of English.

## Developing teaching and learning programs

In developing teaching and learning programs, the two strands – Communicating and Understanding – are integrated to ensure holistic learning in order to attend to active language use and the development of related knowledge, understandings and reflective capabilities.

The set of strands and sub-strands capture a range of dimensions of language use. As such, they are designed to capture the scope; that is, the range and variety of content to be experienced and learnt by students. Teachers will design teaching and learning programs by drawing on the content descriptions from a number of sub-strands and integrating these to create meaningful learning experiences for their particular learners. The emphases across the strands and sub-strands may vary for different bands and pathways, and for different contexts. Since the content descriptions indicate the nature and scope of the learning over several year spans, teachers will make decisions about what aspects of the content descriptions will be taught in what year of their program. Year by year, programs can then be used to inform the development of short-term programs (that is, one term/several weeks).

Taken together, band descriptions, content descriptions, content elaborations and the achievement standards provide an overall sense of 'level' or expectations about language teaching and learning at a given moment in time and over time. In the development of programs, they give a sense of the level of complexity at which student learning can be pitched. In relation to assessment, they provide a reference point for making judgements about students' progress in learning. Teachers will make decisions about pedagogies that best meet the learning needs of their particular students and the context of their particular program.

## Development and implementation considerations

Appropriate consultation with the Deaf community is the cornerstone of respectful Auslan program development, as deaf people are the custodians of their language. Developing and implementing teaching and learning programs in consultation with native or native-like users of Auslan who have ownership of the language is strongly recommended as a special consideration for Auslan programs.

Teaching Auslan without due consideration of, and liaison with, the Deaf community may result in linguistic and cultural appropriation, and disenfranchises deaf people.

Issues to be considered in developing and implementing an Auslan program might include:

- the presence of deaf students within the school environment, for whom the provision of an Auslan program (to L1 and/or L2 learners) would be of benefit academically, socially, emotionally and vocationally
- the proportion of Deaf community members in the region and access to them
- the availability of skilled and appropriate personnel for teaching Auslan.

The importance of engaging with the local Deaf community in an ethical, respectful and sustainable manner is key to an effective Auslan teaching program. Excursions to Deaf community events and the development of ongoing relationships with community members have pedagogical benefits and can build and perpetuate mutual understanding and connections for the benefit of students and the community.

As a three-dimensional visual-spatial language, Auslan is best taught in a face-to-face context. Information and communication technology (ICT) may also play an important role in exposing learners to a variety of signers. However, while ICT resources can provide valuable access to target language and virtual cultural experiences, there is limited availability of digital collections of Auslan materials and texts.

The need to promote further research of Auslan, the collection and digitisation of quality texts, teaching materials, resources and assessment and reporting tools for the purposes of teaching Auslan cannot be underestimated in developing an Auslan program. In addition, investment in training suitable Auslan teachers may be needed to meet the future anticipated interest and demand in Auslan programs in schools.

Schools enrolling deaf and hard of hearing students on the same site may wish to consider offering both L1 and L2 Auslan pathways, or a blend of the two, as needed. Authentic opportunities for deaf and hearing peers to engage with each other allows L2 students to practise language in a real-world context. Such practice benefits for hearing students transfer to deaf students by broadening their peer network, increasing communication across the school and over several year levels for the deaf students, and potentially have social, emotional, psychological, academic and vocational benefits for all students in the program.

Critical to the success of Auslan programs is the fundamental premise that suitably skilled and qualified teachers, preferably native or near-native users of Auslan, should have key roles in the development and implementation of Auslan programs. For more specific guidance and to connect with the Deaf community, contact the peak body representing the needs and interests of Auslan users, [Deaf Australia](#).

*As a native signer, sharing my language with students is a gift I give willingly, knowing with language comes greater understanding, acceptance and respect. Students learn to appreciate my community and culture because they engage directly with me, a Deaf teacher, which is incredibly powerful in the learning experience. I believe my own deaf children will grow up in a much more tolerant and accessible society because of Auslan in schools.*

***Josie Hodgetts, deaf parent of deaf children, Auslan teacher***