



NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF
TRANSLATORS & INTERPRETERS

Te Rōpū Kaiwhakamāori ā-waha, ā-tuhi o Aotearoa

Context

NZSTI made a submission on the draft changes to the New Zealand Curriculum in 2025, responding to proposals that would make language learning “encouraged but not required” in schools. As the national professional association representing translators and interpreters working across more than 60 languages, NZSTI was concerned about the potential long-term impact this shift could have on multilingual capability, cultural understanding, and the future language workforce in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our submission below was sent to the Minister of Education, Erica Stanford from the NZSTI president, Agustina Marianacci. It highlights why language learning, including te reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language, remains an important part of an inclusive and globally connected society.

Tēnā koutou,

The New Zealand Society of Translators and Interpreters welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft New Zealand Curriculum and to express our concern about the significant downgrading of learning languages, including te reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language.

As Aotearoa New Zealand’s national professional association for translators and interpreters since 1986, we represent hundreds of language practitioners who work across all sectors including legal, medical, education, immigration, community support, emergency response, business, and government. Our members support communication across more than 60 languages and uphold standards that ensure equitable access, cultural safety, and professional integrity.

The impact of curriculum changes on Aotearoa’s linguistic future

The draft curriculum states that learning languages is “encouraged but not required”, creating the possibility that schools may opt out entirely. This represents a concerning shift away from valuing multilingualism, intercultural capability, and the standing of te reo Māori and NZSL as official languages of Aotearoa.

Removing the mandate for language learning risks the following:

- reducing students’ exposure to linguistic and cultural diversity in a country where nearly 30% of the population was born overseas (2023 Census);
- diminishing the future pool of translators, interpreters, and language teachers, which are already in high demand due to existing shortages;
- undermining national objectives for te reo Māori revitalisation and NZSL access;



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- limiting young people's ability to participate confidently in an increasingly global, multilingual society.

Translation and interpreting are not only technical skills, they are expressions of cultural literacy, empathy, and deep linguistic understanding. These competencies can start at school.

Importance of language learning to the T&I profession and national wellbeing

These curriculum decisions will have long-term consequences for essential public services. Skilled language professionals are already in short supply across the health, legal, education, and settlement sectors. If language learning is deprioritised at school level, the next generation of practitioners will simply not exist, as command of more than one language is required before accessing any T&I training.

Research consistently shows that children acquire additional languages more easily than adults, meaning that removing early pathways to language learning undermines the future pipeline of translators and interpreters ([The impact of age on second language acquisition; A critical review, 2024](#)). This directly threatens the sustainability of our profession and the quality of language access in Aotearoa.

Ultimately, a strong national curriculum for languages can contribute to:

- safer healthcare
- fairer access to justice
- better educational outcomes for migrant and Deaf communities
- a culturally confident workforce
- support for te reo Māori me ōna tikanga as a taonga
- stronger international relationships and economic opportunities

Language competence is a foundation of social cohesion and equity. It is not an optional extra. Given the long-term impact of removing language learning, this should not be left to chance.

NZSTI's Position

NZSTI strongly supports retaining Learning Languages as a required learning area in the New Zealand Curriculum. We join the collective voice of educators, linguists, communities, and professional bodies in urging the Ministry to do as follows:

- reinstate Learning Languages as a core, compulsory learning area with clear time allocations and resourcing;
- strengthen commitments to te reo Māori and NZSL as official languages with unique cultural significance in Aotearoa;
- ensure equitable access to quality language education nationwide including teacher support, professional development, and curriculum clarity;



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- recognise the downstream impacts on the translation and interpreting profession. Future language professionals cannot be trained if language pathways are removed at school level.

Our Commitment

NZSTI is committed to supporting language education, building professional pathways, and working with government, educators, and community partners to strengthen New Zealand's multilingual future. The decisions made now will shape Aotearoa's linguistic landscape for generations. We urge the Ministry to protect Learning Languages as an essential pillar of education.

Ngā mihi nui,

Agustina Marianacci

President of New Zealand Society of Translators and Interpreters (NZSTI)

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