



**VICTORIAN AUSLAN TRAINING CONSORTIUM:
DELIVERING AUSLAN TRAINING**

MARCH 2014

In July 2013, the Victorian Auslan Training Consortium (VATC) was contracted by the Victorian Government to deliver Certificates II, III and IV in Auslan, and a Diploma of Auslan over a period of 3.5 years. Under the contract, VATC was also required to expand and improve the quality of Auslan training delivery.

VATC will maintain the cultural, linguistic and scholastic integrity of this important training course. The course is integral in ensuring Deaf Victorians are able to continue to participate in every day community life.

About VATC

VATC aims to develop, support and promote Auslan training in Victoria that represents best practice Australia-wide. It also aims to enhance participation of the Deaf community in the provision of new and inclusive language learning.

VATC consortium partners are:

- deafConnectEd (Lead Agent)
- Northern Melbourne Institute of TAFE (NMIT) – Vocational Pathways department (Auslan training provider)
- La Trobe University (Auslan linguistics research and workforce development)
- Vicdeaf (community and stakeholder engagement).

These partners meet regularly to oversee or provide governance to the contract.

VATC's Community Engagement Strategy is the cornerstone of the contract and is assured through the VATC Stakeholder Committee. This committee draws membership from key areas of the Deaf community. Its role is to oversee and provide formalised feedback on VATC activities.

About Auslan



Auslan (Australian Sign Language) is the primary language of Australia's Deaf community, with its own structure and grammatical features that are quite distinct from English. There is also a range of historical and cultural norms and behaviours practised by people in the Deaf community. To graduate from their course, Auslan students must learn and demonstrate competency in these.

When I started the course I just wanted to get some knowledge about Auslan and deaf culture. Now I want to be a teacher of the Deaf.

Adele – Auslan student

Training delivery July to December 2013

VATC Auslan training at NMIT commenced in July 2013. Within only a seven-week start-up period, 64 students were enrolled and four teachers employed. Three additional students enrolled and took part in the regional pilot, which commenced in October.

Training was offered during the semester for the Certificate II in Auslan, which is the first of a series of certificate courses that comprise the Auslan accredited course framework. Each certificate is a prerequisite for a higher qualification, so students will progress through Certificate II to Certificate III, Certificate IV and diploma levels. Students were informed of this requirement before enrolment and a high proportion of them indicated interest in articulating into the diploma program.

Teaching across the semester primarily involved classroom based teaching (face to face) and community engagement activities (series of immersion activities). Planning is underway to integrate video and online delivery in 2014.

Students were divided into three streams across both full time and part time study loads, and the majority of students achieved between 70% and 95% attendance.

“It’s like shutting off one sense and opening another so much more. I wouldn’t find this kind of learning environment anywhere else.”

Mish – Auslan student

Staffing

All NMIT Auslan teachers have qualifications prescribed by the TAE10 Training and Education Training Package.

Additionally, they are offered support, opportunities and pathways to improve their skills and upgrade their qualifications.

Adele

Student – VATC stakeholder committee representative

“Originally Auslan was just a hobby for me, but today it’s a whole lot more. Now I really want to be a teacher of the Deaf. I’m planning to complete my Diploma of Auslan at NMIT, then go on to do a Master of Teaching specialising in hearing impairment.

Our teachers are excellent. Being from the Deaf community themselves, they give us fantastic insight into the language, culture and community. We learn so much from them. Our lessons are based on immersion – we don’t use our voices in class. It’s definitely the best way to learn a language. And we have an interesting group of people in the course too, from all walks of life.

Community engagement activities throughout the course are great. It’s a challenge at first to walk up to a group of Deaf people and sign to them, hoping to be understood. But people in the community are so welcoming, accommodating and willing to chat. By the end of our first excursion we were all a lot more confident.

We get a lot of support from the Deaf community because they really value this course and want to help us. I’m always excited about practicing my Auslan outside the classroom now.”



James
Lead Teacher



“Seeing our students develop their skills and knowledge of Auslan and the Deaf community is the best part of my job. It’s also rewarding to make sure the course engages with and fits the needs of the Deaf community because that’s where our students will use their skills.

The main challenge is the variety of existing skills that students have, especially at Certificate II level. Managing course delivery to make sure all students stay engaged and motivated was a key issue we’ve managed to overcome by splitting students into two groups, at least for some classes. This way we can offer different activities to Auslan newcomers and those some skills and experience. Our aim is to level out student skills and knowledge in preparation for Certificate III.

I have a lot of support from my supervisor and NMIT. We’ve appointed an in-house interpreter/administrator, which means the teaching staff and I have access to immediate communication with our hearing peers, especially the Program Coordinator. I’ve completed two PD activities so far. And NMIT has supported me in re-establishing the Auslan Teachers’ Association, a network where we can share and expand our knowledge and experience.

This year I’ll be undertaking a unit from the Bachelor of Enterprise Learning – BEL101 How adults learn. This will give me more understanding of the learning needs and styles of adult learners, which will help me to support our teachers to deliver quality outcomes for students. It will also build on my ability to offer a varied program to entry-level students of differing abilities.”

Given that ‘native’ speakers are recognised as being more fluent in any language, all teachers are deaf and native users of Auslan. In November an Auslan/English Project Officer/Interpreter was appointed to ensure that the whole Auslan training team can communicate professionally and effectively with each other, with students and with stakeholders.

Delivery statistics

Total enrolments Jul to Dec 2013: 67

Cert II metro: 57

Cert II regional: 10

Part time: 62%

Concession: 52%

Course completion rate: 75.08% (full time day group)

Module completion rates:

- VPC20228 Use simple Auslan for employment purposes 82.76%
- VPC20229 Use simple Auslan for learning purposes 87.5%
- VPC20233 Apply basic principles of learning Auslan as a second language 70.49%
- VPC20234 Identify significant features of Deaf community and culture 70%
- VPC20232 Outline the development for social and educational conditions for the Deaf communities 83.33%
- VPC20231 Use simple Auslan for social and community purposes 70.18%.

Student services

Through NMIT Student Services, Auslan students have access to high level services such as SLAMs (high achieving students who volunteer to support new students), counselling, accommodation and disability support.

On induction, students are informed of support services available and how to access them. All NMIT student services are listed online and information can be accessed through the student portal. NMIT has high level procedures in place to meet the needs of students from a range of cultural backgrounds.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance is integrated into all aspects of development, delivery and management of the Auslan training program. NMIT is a registered training organisation and so the delivery of Auslan programs on NMIT's scope of registration must meet all Australian Quality Training Framework and Australian Skills Quality Authority standards and requirements. NMIT is also accredited under ISO 9001 standard, and the Auslan training program complies with this requirement.

Capturing other student cohorts



While most enrolments for Auslan courses are people who wish to interpret for the Deaf community, it is recognised that there are other cohorts of prospective students.

Parents and other relatives of Deaf children often wish to learn Auslan to increase the levels of communication they have with the child.

Auslan is now an elective subject in some secondary schools (to VCE level), in La Trobe University's humanities area and at the University of Melbourne as a 'breadth' subject, and each of these programs has

significant enrolments. Short courses in Auslan are delivered through Vicdeaf and other providers such as The Auslan Company. There is a clear pathway for the students in all these programs to continue their studies in Auslan via NMIT. The Auslan training team is planning to map the programs against the Auslan accredited courses delivered at NMIT to ensure that pathways for prospective students are clear.

Targeting these additional student cohorts forms part of VATC's marketing plans. A database has been created to record information from people who are interested in learning Auslan and to capture where people live. This information will be used to inform VATC's Regional Delivery Strategy.

"As the parent of a Deaf child, learning Auslan has been essential not only to our communication but also so that I can serve as a positive role model. Learning Auslan shows my child that I value her Deaf identity and opens the world of rich Deaf culture and heritage to both of us."

Mai – Auslan student and a parent of a deaf child.

Preparation for regional delivery

Delivery of Auslan training to regional centres in Victoria is a key part of VATC's contract. A regional pilot was conducted with students in Bendigo (October to December 2013) to test and refine a proposed model of delivery to regional centres in Victoria.

The pilot used a blended delivery model that included:

- video conferencing sessions to a regional centre
- online learning using Moodle (uploading documents, images and resources)
- local regional community activities.

“Excited is how I feel when I come to class. I haven’t missed a single class. I was part of the pilot program in Bendigo and that was fantastic. You get so involved in the class you forget it’s via videoconference.”

“The course format in the Bendigo pilot includes Moodle which I think is fantastic. It has all the class readings. It lets you revise, refresh and double check.”

Kim, Auslan student, Regional Victoria

The pilot used communicative teaching methodology. It also built in opportunities for language immersion outside the video conferencing classroom by engaging a local Deaf community member as an Auslan language tutor to facilitate communication activities (and dialogue with local Deaf community members) and encourage attendance at local Deaf community events. This ensured that students were given maximum opportunity to practise the language in a safe environment and to gain knowledge of the local Auslan ‘dialect’.

To evaluate student engagement and outcomes in this pilot, students were surveyed at a midway point and at the end of the delivery. Experiences and recommendations from the pilot will inform the future regional delivery model. During 2014, VATC will develop a comprehensive Regional Delivery Strategy that includes a range of support for regional students.

Naomi Language Tutor

“I found my role interesting and challenging. I absolutely enjoyed being a tutor. The students all told me how much they appreciated working with me, helping them practise their Auslan skills and giving them some knowledge about Deaf culture.

Ross's instructions were very clear. I was happy with all communication methods and I didn't feel afraid to ask for help if I needed it. At the first tutoring session, I found the venue very noisy and distracting and I suggested that we moved to another cafe. It was heaps better and quieter, and I found the students more focused.

I enjoyed working with the students and helping them out in areas where they were struggling. I've learnt a lot from them. I'd be more than happy to continue this role next year.”



Resource development

To optimise delivery of Auslan training, VATC is undertaking a project that involves documenting and reviewing existing Auslan resources nationally, identifying resource development gaps and completing a comprehensive Resource Development Strategy by the end of 2014.



A priority is development of online modules to support regional and online delivery. For the regional pilot held during the first semester, two units of competency (VU20230 Use simple Auslan for personal use and VU20234 Identify significant features of the Deaf community and culture) were

successfully delivered via Moodle, and these will be further enhanced for online delivery in 2014. An additional 12 units have been identified as suitable for online delivery, which will free up classroom time for more interactive language learning. VATC is developing an online project plan with the NMIT VET e-Learning team as part of the Regional Development Strategy.

To support VATC resource development, a range of professional development programs for teachers were held on Moodle and online delivery, and there are plans to build on that knowledge in 2014.

Technology solutions

Both regional and local delivery of Auslan training will increasingly involve online and other technological options. As mentioned previously, 14 units of competency from the Auslan accredited training certificates in Auslan are being considered for online delivery.

Moodle has already been utilised to enhance delivery and professional development provided for teachers. To identify the appropriate platform for the program, VATC worked extensively with the NMIT VET e-Learning team.

For optimum delivery in regional areas, it is important that VATC has access to quality synchronous video conferencing facilities. The original plan was to use the Department of Human Services Vicdeaf/Vantage system, but the availability of this system is now on hold due to internal departmental policy changes over which VATC has no control. The Department of Human Services is planning to conduct a tender process for future delivery of video remote interpreting services to the Deaf community, and this may be able to provide the service required. VATC is monitoring the situation and is staying in touch with departmental representatives.

Additionally, NMIT is exploring opportunities to offer video conferencing from Prahran campus. A submission to the TAFE Structural Assistance Fund includes funding for this service and VATC is waiting for the outcome of this application.

VATC is investigating the feasibility of a freecall helpline to ensure Auslan students are not disadvantaged by technical problems during their learning.



Research

Since May 2013, VATC staff have recorded the numbers and locations of enquiries for Auslan training provision. Over time this research provided the basis for planning of regional delivery in areas such as Gippsland, Bendigo, Mildura and Geelong.

Student surveys form the basis of continuous improvement processes. Surveys of all students are conducted every semester and results are consolidated. This feedback will inform planning for future programs.

To evaluate student engagement and outcomes in the regional pilot, students were surveyed at a midway point and at the end of their studies. The information they provided was included in the report on the pilot.

VATC intends to seek funding to undertake research into teaching Auslan using e-learning methodologies through the next round of Australian Research Council Linkage Grants.

Workforce development

NMIT requires all teaching staff to have a TAE10 and a Bachelor of LOTE qualification to teach Auslan, and this impacts on Auslan delivery.

Generally, Auslan teachers do not have high level teaching qualifications and this is an issue for VATC going forward. Many come from a community setting and have little experience in teaching pedagogy to the level required for delivery to diploma level. Other workforce challenges include no standard qualification for Auslan teachers, pedagogy skills and knowledge gaps, and gaps in knowledge of Auslan linguistics. In addition, the Bachelor of LOTE (Auslan) is no longer offered by La Trobe University, creating a gap in post-secondary qualifications for people wanting to teach Auslan.

To address this need, and to ensure the best applicants have the required qualifications, VATC has planned professional development sessions for current staff to upgrade their qualifications and held information sessions for prospective teaching position applicants. A workforce audit will be conducted in 2014 to identify staff skills and knowledge, find out what skills and knowledge best

Ross

Training Specialist



“I work with the teaching pedagogy of the NMIT Auslan program, making sure the training meets VET and higher education requirements. At the moment this means identifying PD and training needs such as flexible and online delivery, working with the NMIT VET e-Learning team on instructional design and putting together theory based courses in Moodle.

We’re also encouraging teachers to use the online digital repository service for resources, to access and become familiar with Moodle (considering students with LLN needs) and to build on their teaching methods.

Moodle and videoconferencing have major benefits. Students can study and access resources anywhere and at any time to fit in with their life and work commitments. They can retrieve videos, images, resources, readings, links, knowledge quizzes and websites via Moodle stored by the teachers. Teachers can screen resources during classroom delivery directly from computer, laptop or mobile device connected to a data projector, all shared from a central storage hub.

It’s sometimes a challenge working at an institute that has me using my brains at an academic level, given that my background is in the arts and as a creative producer. It’s stimulating too. Having an understanding boss who’s deaf and fluent in Auslan makes my work life easier. I’m also studying the Bachelor of Enterprise Learning so I’m really learning as I do my tasks.

The most rewarding part of my job so far was trialling regional delivery. It all worked out so well, and I learnt so much – there are always solutions to hurdles!”

practice Auslan teachers need, then identify appropriate training and professional development programs. Discussions have been held with La Trobe University and the NMIT Teaching and Learning Division to assist with this project.

A submission for funding to develop a Workforce Development Strategy is also underway. This strategy will cover Auslan teachers employed by NMIT and the entire Victorian Auslan workforce. There is also potential for a best practice model to be rolled out nationally.

NMIT's Auslan Lead Teacher and the Training Specialist have both enrolled in a Bachelor of Enterprise Learning for 2014, a program that includes subjects on online learning. They will bring new knowledge to the Auslan training team.



Professional development

NMIT offers a comprehensive professional development program for all staff, teaching and non-teaching, that can be accessed by Auslan teachers. Other professional development will be organised as a need is identified and through the work skills audit when it is completed.

In the July to December 2013 period, Auslan teachers participated in the following professional development:

- Introduction to a Communicative Approach (Jul)
- Using the Moodle Online Learning Management System (Jul)
- Unpacking the Training Package: AQTF and QA (Jul & Aug)
- Induction on Validation and Moderation Processes (Aug)
- Faculty Conference: *Reimagining education: transformative practices beyond today* (Oct)
- Australian Sign Language Interpreters' Association Conference (Sydney, Oct).

Staff also completed CATS (capability assessment tools) surveys in October and November, and these will feed into 2014 professional development plans. CATS provide a systematic, whole-of-organisation approach to measuring and growing staff capability and organisational potential.



Leadership

To ensure senior staff show leadership in the team environment, and that Auslan teachers have the support required, senior staff are encouraged to share skills through specialist joint projects. At present, senior staff mentor and advise other staff as required. Projects underway (such as the regional pilot and review of existing Auslan resources) offer teaching staff opportunities to learn from their supervisors and to develop their own skills. In 2014, it is planned to identify small projects and allocate one to each teacher as part of their work, with leadership from the Teaching Specialist.

Community engagement

Active community engagement is an important part of NMIT's Auslan training provision and is formalised in governance documentation. VATC recognises that it is integral to success of the course and the employability of graduates.

Every effort is made to ensure students have a range of opportunities throughout their studies to engage with the Deaf community on a regular basis.

Five excursions and an incursion were conducted in the July to December 2013 period:

- Victorian College for the Deaf Open Day, October: Students inspected the longstanding Deaf school, learned about its history, signing methods used by teachers, student activities and the boarding house. All were a part of unit requirements.
- Deaf Street Day, October: This event celebrating Deafness, Deaf culture and Auslan was held during the National Week of Deaf People. It brought students together with members of the Deaf community, giving them an opportunity to practise receptive and expression skills.
- John M. Lovett Memorial Service, October: This day commemorated the life of a pivotal figure in the Victorian, Australian and world Deaf communities, again giving students an opportunity to learn about community values and communicate with the Deaf community.
- Deaf Children Australia History Tour, November: A visit to the iconic bluestone in St Kilda Road allowed students to view historical artefacts and photographs, enjoy a BBQ and engage in a range of practical activities facilitated by Deaf adults.
- Vicdeaf Christmas Rally, December: This annual event brings Deaf Victorians, friends and families together. Students learned about Deaf culture, celebrations, communications and social protocols.
- Associate Professor Adam Schembri from La Trobe University presented on cultural sensitivity and political correctness to enhance understanding of Auslan linguistics.

"All the teachers are really impressive, personality wise and teaching wise – they make me want to impress them – I work really hard!"

Auslan student

VATC is developing a formal Community Engagement Strategy for 2014 and beyond to help students integrate into the Deaf community in a more meaningful way and add depth to their studies.

Marketing

Marketing strategies to be undertaken by VATC will target the Deaf and non-Deaf communities. Initial promotion of the course included:

- an Auslan training page on the deafConnectEd website
- course information on the NMIT website
- brochures developed and distributed.

To ensure marketing efforts are targeted and effective, VATC has engaged a Marketing Consultant to:

- develop a sub-strategy for each prospective student cohort, to ensure maximum take-up
- conduct comprehensive student surveys and interviews to inform planning

- develop a professional and sustainable brand for VATC that will ensure longevity of course provision
- develop a communications plan that includes multiple ways to engage with stakeholders in an ongoing way
- develop a Community Engagement Strategy that provides students with immersion opportunities, informs the community about courses and promotes graduates to prospective employers.

Initial briefings

Before delivery of the course commenced, VATC conducted a community information and briefing session that outlined the new model. The session involved all consortium partners and was streamed live via the web.

Ongoing communications

A regular VATC e-newsletter – *Auslan Updates*– conveys information to all VATC stakeholders, and four issues were distributed in the period July to December 2013. The database is constantly updated to ensure maximum relevant coverage.

VATC will also use other communication channels to inform stakeholders, including:

- VATC Stakeholder Committee
- NMIT Auslan web page
- Vicdeaf and deafConnectEd communications
- Facebook/LinkedIn/websites.



VATC brand

VATC has also committed to developing and promoting a professional VATC brand that will be instantly recognisable, memorable and sustainable beyond the term of this contract. It is expected that the branding task will be completed by December 2014.

Interpreting and employment pathways

The suite of Auslan courses provides students with a range of employment pathways and VATC currently ensures employer engagement by:

- inviting employer representatives on to the VATC Stakeholder Committee
- inviting an Industry Training Board representative onto the VATC Stakeholder Committee
- ensuring students have appropriate employability skills as well as their qualification
- planning to introduce graduate development programs (with La Trobe University)
- strengthening pathways to RMIT Diploma of Interpreting.

The VATC Stakeholder Committee has broad representation from the relevant Industry Training Advisory Board and from consumers who access services that employ Auslan interpreters and other professionals who work with the Deaf community. VATC plans to include employer liaison in an

appropriate strategy by 31 December 2014, and this will include surveying employers to identify their requirements in terms of graduate skills.

Employability skills

VATC has identified that there are other skills (external to the Auslan program) that employers require, for example skills in presentation, communication, cultural diversity, negotiation, positive advocacy and relationship building. As with all courses and qualifications under the Australian Qualifications Framework, NMIT as the registered training organisation integrates these skills with program delivery to ensure graduate employability. Further enhancement in this area may be identified and included as part of the 2015 course review.

Skills recognition

Students in NMIT's Auslan courses have access to a skills recognition process and are provided with information on this option at the course enquiry and information session stages. Guidelines for both students and teachers are in place and distributed.

Pathways to the Diploma of Interpreting

“Life changing – I’m a different person after starting this course. I’m more confident and passionate – this isn’t just an area of interest for me now.”

Adele, Auslan student

Establishing a pathway to from the Diploma of Auslan to the Diploma of Interpreting is critical. There is a recognised shortage of Auslan interpreters, and this situation is set to worsen as introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme increases participation in mainstream communities.

To work as an interpreter, a person must have NAATI (National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters) accreditation. The NAATI examination forms part of the assessment for the Diploma of Interpreting at RMIT University. It is a VATC priority to develop a strong working relationship with RMIT and establish a clear pathway between the Diploma of Auslan and the RMIT qualification. An RMIT representative has been appointed to the VATC Stakeholder Committee.

Other pathways

VATC recognises that there is a wide range of employment pathways open to Auslan graduates, as the qualification may be useful for social workers, employment consultants, psychologists, doctors, community workers, and anyone who wants to communicate better with the Deaf community.

