

Who is out there?

MAPPING LANGUAGE organisations in Aotearoa

Executive Summary

This report outlines the size, diversity and importance of the multi-language sector in Aotearoa New Zealand, and the value of the organisations who provide services in this area. The report has been produced by Languages Alliance Aotearoa NZ1 (hereon abbreviated to Languages Alliance), an unaffiliated working group which draws on expertise, interest, and experience in the status and use of languages in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Our nation's linguistic diversity (over 170 languages spoken, with nearly 1 in 4 residents speaking more than one language) brings a wide range of social, cultural, educational and economic benefits to individuals, communities and to the nation as a whole. It is vital that language services be accessible and affordable to those who require them in all areas of life, including healthcare and justice, yet feedback from the sector indicated that little is known about the language sector by the general population, policy makers and other stakeholders, and even by those in the sector itself.

The Languages Alliance decided to undertake this research into the multi-language sector in order to raise awareness of the important work done by hundreds of small and large organisations in the community, many of which run entirely on voluntary labour, as they support and celebrate the many languages spoken in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The literature indicates four main categories of actions that are needed in order to ensure that diverse languages thrive in a society: seeing the language valued; opportunities to learn the language; opportunities to use it in authentic settings; and support to maintain it from one generation to the next.

This literature scan provides a picture of the environment in which language organisations operate. It has also informed the design and analysis of the research.

Between late 2019 and early 2023, the Languages Alliance completed an extensive internet search and survey of the language sector across Aotearoa New Zealand. The aim of this search was to understand three main areas:

- the size and breadth of the language sector in Aotearoa New Zealand (i.e. Number of organisations, size, range of services)
- how accessible the language services are in Aotearoa New Zealand (i.e. Languages supported, geographical reach, costs to users)
- how language services in Aotearoa New Zealand are supported (i.e. funding sources, number of staff and volunteers)

An internet search identified 538 organisations which supported language diversity in some way. Of these, 156 organisations responded to our survey.

The top six languages supported by survey respondents were English, Mandarin, Japanese, French, Spanish, and te reo Māori. NZSL was much further down the list in the 16th position. The organisations surveyed ranged from very small, volunteer-led community groups to very large, well-resourced services with over 100 paid staff. They offered a wide range of language

activities, contributing to all four of the value, learn, maintain and use categories of language support. Only 31% of the organisations received any form of government funding.

On the basis of this research, the Languages Alliance recommends a series of connected actions to more effectively support language organisations in their important work in order to provide language communities with easier access to services. Our recommendations are:

1. Forming an umbrella body for languages as a collective voice for organisations that support languages and to create connections across the sector
2. Developing a website, using the data gathered in our survey as a starting point, so people can find language services in their area
3. Requiring schools to ensure that all children learn te reo Māori at school, as of right, from year 1 to year 10
4. Resourcing community language schools to offer language learning to school-age students as well as adults, either within or outside school time, and recognising this learning in school academic records
5. Creating a Community Languages Framework as recommended by the Human Rights Commission
6. Reviewing eligibility rules for subsidised English language support to include support for migrants who do not yet have residence.
7. Establishing a national languages policy to provide coherent support for language diversity across government departments.