

Auslan Short Courses

Deaf Australia provides Auslan Short Courses (ASC) for Queensland state school staff. A few years ago Education Queensland announced that it would spend \$30m to change from Signed English to Auslan. The ASC program is a very small part of this \$30m program. The \$30m transition to Auslan program includes a lot of other things that have nothing to do with Deaf Australia – such as Auslan Language Models (ALM's) employed in schools, a training program for teachers of the deaf at Griffith University, money for schools to buy resources, and so on.

The ASC are different to other Auslan courses taught by, e.g., TAFE. The ASC courses are special courses for school settings and topics and they focus on learning Auslan grammar and discourse (conversation). They teach the students how to make meaning and to develop their communication skills. The students are then able to more effectively communicate ideas about, for example, school holiday plans and school subject matter with their Deaf students, at a basic level. They also help teachers who know Signed English to understand how Auslan is different from Signed English and that Auslan is not a simple or unsophisticated language.

Deaf Australia started the ASC project in October 2008, and the first courses started in term 1, 2009 in Brisbane. Courses started in the regions in term 3, 2009. The program has 4 levels – introductory, level 1, level 2, level 3. Each level runs for 20 hours. The introductory level is for people who have no signing experience. People who have some sign experience, e.g., Signed English, start at level 1. The introductory level has no assessments. Levels 1, 2, and 3 all have assessments – i.e., students must pass a test for each level before they can move on to the next level. Assessments are done by a team of experienced teachers who have been trained to do assessments – i.e., the ASC teachers do not assess their own students.

The ASC are basic introductory courses – no one can learn Auslan in 60 or 80 hours. But they give the students a very good grounding in the basic linguistics (not all the linguistics) of Auslan so that as they develop their vocabulary, e.g., by interacting with ALM's in their school, they can use the signs in a meaningful way.

Because the ASC courses are different to other Auslan courses, all of our ASC teachers are given special training in how to teach the ASC courses.

The ASC courses were written Dr Donovan Cresdee, a Deaf native Auslan user from a Deaf family and the only person in Australia with a PhD in the teaching of Auslan. Donovan also planned a two-week pre-service training program for our ASC teachers and taught some of it; trained the assessors; and continues to be a consultant to the program. Neil Wood co-ordinates the program – he organises classes and allocates ASC teachers to classes, provides ongoing training and support to ASC teachers and generally manages the day to day running of the program, with assistance from Rebecca Driscoll. Some experienced ASC teachers help Neil with the training.

The ASC team includes about 20 casual teachers. Some teachers have not yet been trained to teach all levels. Teachers must start teaching at the first level – i.e., a teacher who has not yet taught level 1 is not assigned to teach level 2. A few teachers are teaching only at lower levels – either because they prefer this or because they need more training. Sometimes some teachers do not have a class, usually because there are no classes at their level in their area that term.

Deaf Australia is continually evaluating the program. We have regular meetings with Education Queensland to resolve any issues; all classes are given evaluation forms to fill out; students are assessed; and ASC teachers give us feedback. Not everyone likes everything in the program; some improvements are being made – there is always room for improvement in any program. But the overall response has been excellent. Responses on completed evaluation forms have been almost 100% positive. From Term 1, 2009 to Term 1, 2010 a total of 402 assessments have been completed (some students have done all 3 levels of assessment). Of these, 97.52% have passed. This is a very successful outcome. Well done to ASC teaching staff and students for their achievements.