

SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE EMPLOYMENT, WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE, INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

There are two kinds of issues associated with the education of students with disabilities that the University of Adelaide wishes to bring to the Senate Committee's attention. They relate to terms of reference a) 5,6, and 8.

1. FUNDING

Supporting students with disabilities is a costly exercise, more so for universities with older campuses and therefore a greater number of buildings that inaccessible for students with mobility impairments. There is also variation in different states and regional locations in the amount and kind of support available to students from other services, and therefore the extent to which the universities must fill the gaps.

The legislative requirements imposed by the Disability Discrimination Act are extremely challenging for universities where significant capital expenditure is required to make lecture theatres and buildings accessible. A system of contestable grants for such purposes would be an initiative that could transform the physical infrastructure of key universities in a brief period of time.

There is a specific concern with the funding of postgraduate students now that funding is in general on the basis of rate of completion. Some postgraduate students may require additional time and it is not clear that universities will not be disadvantaged in having students with disabilities requiring extra time enrol in postgraduate research. Naturally the risk is that students universities consider might fit into that category may be discriminated against. This is a matter that requires clarification through the Research Training Scheme Guidelines.

2. STANDARDS IN ACCOMMODATIONS

The University of Adelaide would like to suggest that the Commonwealth develop guidelines outlining reasonable accommodations for students for the full range of disabilities. These guidelines would assist university staff in determining what is reasonable and would also contribute to a shared understanding across the tertiary education sector and hence greater equity for students. Obviously there would also need to be discretion used, as many complexities would require flexibility in the application of these guidelines.

Examples include:

- The provision of individual tutoring. Case examples illustrating where this is appropriate would prove very useful.
- The provision of specialised software and equipment for home use. Case examples of when the institution pays and when the student pays would again assist equitable decision-making.
- Who pays to meet student's personal needs on campus? Students with quadriplegia for example, may need assistance at meal times or in rest rooms.

Prepared by the Division of Student and Staff Services