

Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities. Submission from the National Library of Australia.

On March 8 2002 the National Library of Australia convened a Forum on Library Services for People with Disabilities, to identify areas in which library services to people with disabilities could be improved through action taken at a national level. The Forum was attended by representatives of a range of library and disability organisations, including the Council of Australian University Librarians and the Australian School Libraries' Association.

A number of the issues discussed were of concern to those interested in the education of students with disabilities. These included:

- The high costs of conversion of print resources to a format suitable for use by students with a vision disability and the lack of a national database of the masters created in this process, resulting in much duplication of effort;
- Lack of captioning on film/video resources used in education;
- Poor coverage, identification and accessibility of materials in alternative formats in library catalogues;
- Copyright compliance workloads in providing resources for students with disabilities.

The Forum agreed on a wide range of actions that will facilitate access to materials for people with disabilities through the promotion of standards and guidelines, including web accessibility; promotion of the availability of library materials for people with disabilities and further dialogue aimed at easing copyright compliance for organisations producing alternative format materials. The recommendations from the Forum are attached at Appendix 1.

Major issues which are not being addressed are:

- The future of the large collections of material on analogue tape held by specialist libraries for the Blind and vision impaired. This material will not be able to be accessed in three to five years time as equipment to play the tapes will no longer be manufactured. These libraries do not have access to funding to facilitate the transfer of information from analogue to digital tape.
- The production of information resources in alternative formats for disabled students (and others). This is an important issue for the university sector and will be discussed at a meeting to be hosted by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission in the near future



Director General
National Library of Australia

Appendix 1.

Recommendations from the Forum on Library Services for People with Disabilities – 8 March 2002

That the National Information and Library Service (NILS) refer the Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) standard for the production of digital talking books to the appropriate standards body for possible adoption as an Australian standard. The National Library of Australia will identify the appropriate body and report back to NILS. Target date: Dec 2002

That the National Information and Library Service (NILS) act as a central point for advice and information about the Digital Accessible Information System (DAISY) standard. Target date: ongoing

That the National Library of Australia and the National Braille Authority refer the Unified English Braille Code to the appropriate standards body for possible adoption as an Australian standard (in order to facilitate the exchange of Braille information resources). Target date: Sept 2002

That the National Library of Australia continue to promote the addition of records for materials in alternative formats to the National Bibliographic Database, and encourage the appropriate identification of such materials in library catalogues throughout Australia. Target date: Jun 2002

That the National Library of Australia and the Copyright Agency Limited investigate the setting up of a national database of information about master copies of resources converted to digital format for the production of alternative formats. Target date: Dec 2002

That the Copyright Agency Limited work with disability organisations and members of the Australian Publishers Association to develop a code of practice for fair dealing on materials for library users with disabilities, and convene a working party to discuss the simplification of copyright compliance for services to these users. The working party should include representatives of the Australian Libraries Copyright Committee, the Australian Library and Information Association and the National Library of Australia. Target date: Sept 2002

That the issue of services to indigenous library users with disabilities be referred to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Libraries Resources Network (ATSILRN) by the National Library of Australia, with a request for a paper on this issue to be included in the program for their next conference. This issue will also be brought to the attention of the National Indigenous Disability Network. Target date: Jun 2002

That the National Library of Australia, the Council of Australian University Librarians and the Council of Australian State Libraries publicise the need for library catalogues on the web to be accessible to people with disabilities to at Least Level A (existing catalogues) or Level AA (new catalogues), as specified by the W3C Web Content Accessibility Guidelines. Target date: Jun 2002

That the National Library of Australia work with Vision Australia to scope a pilot project to test the feasibility of receiving publications in Extensible Markup Language (XML) format. Target date: Sept 2002

That the Australian Library and Information Association investigate the coverage of disability-related issues in current library and information management courses. Target date: July 2002

That the National Library of Australia provide links from the Australian Libraries Gateway (ALG) to web accessibility guidelines. Target date: June 2002

That a list of training providers who can deliver disability awareness training be developed and promulgated. The State Library of New South Wales to lead on this. Target date Sept 2002

Agreed actions

The National Library of Australia and the Australian Association of the Deaf will promote the availability of the captioned videos in the National Library's collection. Target date: Jun 2002

The Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission will provide assistance in the development of Disability Action Plans and implementation of the Disability Discrimination Act. Target date: ongoing

The Australian Association of the Deaf will assist in awareness training for library staff. Target date: ongoing.