

## Table of Contents

<b>SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>2.0 DEFINITION.....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.0.1 Recommendation 1 .....	5
<b>3.0 CURRENT SITUATION.....</b>	<b>5</b>
3.1 ASSESSING STUDENT NEED .....	5
3.2 MATERIAL TRANSCRIPTION.....	5
3.2.1 Recommendation 2 .....	6
<b>4.0 FUNDING.....</b>	<b>7</b>
4.1 TRANSCRIPTION COST .....	7
4.1.1 Recommendation 3 .....	8
4.1.2 Recommendation 4 .....	8
4.2 NON-UNIVERSITY TRANSCRIPTION .....	8
4.2.1 Recommendation 5 .....	9
4.3 EQUIPMENT FUNDING .....	9
4.3.1 Recommendation 6 .....	10
<b>5.0 PUBLISHING .....</b>	<b>10</b>
5.0.1 Recommendation 7 .....	10
5.1 STORAGE.....	11
5.1.1 Recommendation 8 .....	11
<b>6.0 INTERNET/WEB-BASED EDUCATION.....</b>	<b>11</b>
6.0.1 Recommendation 9 .....	12
<b>APPENDIX ONE: BLIND CITIZENS AUSTRALIA’S EDUCATION POLICY.....</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>14</b>

## Summary of Recommendations

- R1** That DETYA undertake research to determine the number of students at universities with a print disability.
- R2** That minimum service standards be introduced for the provision of course materials to students with a print disability by universities. All students should receive course materials in their preferred format at the same time. Texts should be transcribed and provided to students within three weeks of the student requesting the material.
- R3** That funding for material transcription urgently be substantially increased and provided to universities on a full-time student equivalent basis. The level of funding should be determined with reference to the graphical complexity of the materials required in the course, and the amount of required materials in the course.
- R4** That a once off payment be provided to universities to assist them to meet the anticipated increase in transcription costs from January 2002. The payment should be sufficient to meet the extra costs incurred until a new system of funding transcription costs is introduced.
- R5** That the Committee refer the issue of access to transcribed materials for students who are attending non-university courses to an appropriate body for consideration.

- R6** That universities receive additional funding to provide necessary equipment to students with a print disability to enable them to study effectively. Students should have access to this equipment at home.
- R7** That all publishers of textbooks and required readings be legislatively compelled to provide an appropriately formatted, electronic copy of the material to a nominated agency, to facilitate braille and large print production of the material.
- R8** That a central body, for example, the National Library of Australia, be tasked with the responsibility of maintaining a catalogue of materials available in alternative formats, including materials available internationally. This body should also be responsible for liaising with publishers to receive and securely store electronic versions of texts.
- R9** That public funding of universities be contingent on university web sites complying with the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0. This includes the web sites of any other teaching organisations that provide courses that are available to students as part of their degree. Funding should also be contingent on universities utilising research resources and tools, for example, databases and catalogues, which comply with the Accessibility Guidelines.

## **1.0 Introduction**

Blind Citizens Australia is the peak national advocacy body representing the interests of the estimated 600,000 Australians who are blind, vision impaired or who have a print disability (ABS 1998, BCA 1996). Blind Citizens Australia is Australia’s only national, member based blindness organisation.

This submission will address section (d) of the Inquiry’s Terms of Reference relating to the access to higher education of students with a print disability. A copy of Blind Citizens Australia’s education policy is attached and forms part of this submission.

## **2.0 Definition**

The Department of Community Services and Health (1989) defined people with a print disability as:

- people who are blind or have severe vision impairments;
- people with physical disabilities who cannot hold or manipulate printed materials in standard form;
- people who are deaf or have intellectual disabilities which impair their capacity to learn language;
- people who have lost an understanding of language owing to brain damage; or
- people with a combination of two or more of the above disabilities.

It is estimated that approximately 3% of Australians have a print disability (BCA 1996). Universities do not collect data on the number of students

with a print disability, nor are they required to report to DETYA the number of students with a print disability they assist.

### **2.0.1 Recommendation 1**

That DETYA undertake research to determine the number of students at universities with a print disability.

## **3.0 Current situation**

### **3.1 Assessing student need**

Students who cannot access course materials or texts in standard print form are assessed by the responsible officer within each university's disability resource centre. Some student needs can be met in-house, for example note takers or course material in accessible electronic format (electronic documents are inaccessible when they cannot be read by synthetic voice recognition software). Those needs that cannot be met (for example, required textbooks in large print, braille, audio and accessible electronic format) will be obtained externally by the university, usually from a blindness agency. The National Information and Library Service is a major provider of transcription services in Australia

Theoretically students can request that additional (not required) readings be transcribed, however these are given low priority, and are unlikely to be provided due to waiting times.

### **3.2 Material transcription**

The waiting time for the transcription of materials varies across Australia however, it is not uncommon for students to wait 13 weeks for required

course readings. Blind Citizens Australia is aware of one case in which a student is still waiting for materials required for first semester 2001. Anecdotal evidence suggests that periodic reductions in waiting times reported by transcription services are primarily the result of students being forced to drop subjects because of the lack of access to course materials.

The current inadequate provision of transcribed materials is forcing students to rely on the extremely limited range of materials that can be accessed electronically via the internet and library catalogues and databases. This restricts both the quality and quantity of material that can be accessed by students, and severely affects the quality of the student’s learning, particularly post-graduate research students.

Equity demands that students with a print disability receive their course materials at the same time as other students. Occasional delays in the production of texts in alternative formats may be unavoidable but there is no excuse for university course materials not to be made available to students in alternative formats at the same time as other students receive them.

### **3.2.1 Recommendation 2**

That minimum service standards be introduced for the provision of course materials to students with a print disability by universities. All students should receive course materials in their preferred format at the same time. Texts should be transcribed and provided to students within three weeks of the student requesting the material.

## 4.0 Funding

### 4.1 Transcription cost

The transcription of materials can be very expensive depending on the format required, whether an electronic copy of the text is available, and whether the material to be transcribed contains extensive diagrams or complex formulas. For example, a quote obtained by a student for the braille of a 300 page (975 braille pages) medical textbook which contained multiple diagrams was \$5,483.15. Universities do not receive additional or specific funding to meet the costs of transcription.

The National Information Library Service has provided transcription services for universities at a heavily subsidised rate. We estimate that universities have only been billed for 7-8% of the cost of transcription. The Library however recently announced its intention to move to a full cost recovery model of operation from 1 January 2002. The effect of this move will be to dramatically increase the cost impost on universities. Blind Citizens Australia does not anticipate that all universities will be in a financial position to meet this extra cost. As a consequence, we anticipate that many students' needs will not be met in the coming academic year.

The Government has announced funding to universities of \$8 million over three years, commencing next year, to support 1,500 high-need students, including, but not limited to, students with a print disability. This is equivalent to \$1,778 per student per year, or \$889 per student per semester. If, as expected, the cost of braille increases next year to at least \$3.50 per page, \$889 per student would purchase only about 85 pages of material, perhaps 2-3 chapters of a required text, or a quarter of

a subject reading pack (one page of printed text is roughly equivalent to 3 pages of braille).

#### **4.1.1 Recommendation 3**

That funding for material transcription urgently be substantially increased and provided to universities on a full-time student equivalent basis. The level of funding should be determined with reference to the graphical complexity of the materials required in the course, and the amount of required materials in the course.

#### **4.1.2 Recommendation 4**

That a once off payment be provided to universities to assist them to meet the anticipated increase in transcription costs from January 2002. The payment should be sufficient to meet the extra costs incurred until a new system of funding transcription costs is introduced.

### **4.2 Non-university transcription**

Although it is not within the terms of reference of this inquiry, we would take this opportunity to draw the Committee’s attention to the inequitable position of students studying courses at institutions that are not publicly funded, including full fee paying adult education courses. Students in these courses are being asked to fund the entire cost of transcription themselves. Transcription service providers are yet to introduce a sliding fee-scale or a hardship clause to allow students who attend small institutions that do not obtain public funding equal access to the wide range of educational opportunities offered to other Australians.



### 4.2.1 Recommendation 5

That the Committee refer the issue of access to transcribed materials for students who are attending non-university courses to an appropriate body for consideration.

### 4.3 Equipment funding

The majority of students access materials electronically. It is debatable if this reflects student preference or university preference – the provision of materials electronically is much cheaper for universities. However, the shift to requiring students to have access to electronic communication equipment has significant repercussions for all students without the financial means to access the technology. This will be more pronounced for students with a print disability, who will require access to some, if not most, of the following:

- laptop computer	\$ 3,000
- scanner (with OCR software)	\$ 550
- synthetic voice recognition software	\$ 1,475
- screen enlargement software	\$ 895
- closed circuit TV	\$ 1,885
- braille embosser	\$ 4,350

Some state governments provide funding that students can access to purchase this equipment, however these programmes are limited and the Federal Government's Pensioner Education Supplement is not sufficient to meet such costs. Student access to this equipment on campus is erratic, for example, students commonly find that the software they need to access computers has been deleted.

### **4.3.1 Recommendation 6**

That universities receive additional funding to provide necessary equipment to students with a print disability to enable them to study effectively. Students should have access to this equipment at home.

## **5.0 Publishing**

The largest contributing factor to the cost and time taken to transcribe material is the need to reproduce the document if it is not available in electronic format. While some publishers readily provide books and texts in electronic format to allow transcription into braille or large print, there are many that do not.

In Texas, USA, legislation referred to as the **Braille Bill** has been introduced requiring publishers of all secondary school textbooks to provide the text, formatted appropriately, to a central agency, for braille production. The documents are stored securely to protect the publishers’ copyright. A similar system, extended to university materials, should be introduced in Australia.

### **5.0.1 Recommendation 7**

That all publishers of textbooks and required readings be legislatively compelled to provide an appropriately formatted, electronic copy of the material to a nominated agency, to facilitate braille and large print production of the material.

## **5.1 Storage**

Australian libraries, blindness agencies, universities and other bodies have a wealth of material available in alternative formats. Internationally, there are various agencies which are dedicated to the dissemination of materials in alternative formats (see for example Recording for the Blind and Dyslexic at <http://www.rfdb.org>). Unfortunately, there is no catalogue of the materials available, resulting in poor use of the materials available and unnecessary duplication of resources.

### **5.1.1 Recommendation 8**

That a central body, for example, the National Library of Australia, be tasked with the responsibility of maintaining a catalogue of materials available in alternative formats, including materials available internationally. This body should also be responsible for liaising with publishers to receive and securely store electronic versions of texts.

## **6.0 Internet/web-based education**

Universities are increasingly relying on students having access to the internet both for administrative purposes, enrolment etc, and for study purposes. Newly forged links between overseas and Australian universities, the expansion of on-line learning for off campus/distance education students and the reduced costs to the provider of providing education materials on-line all point to the further expansion of internet based education.

Unfortunately, this increase has not been accompanied by a consideration of the needs of students with a print disability, leading to inaccessible web sites. (Examples of inaccessible web sites include sites that rely solely on

graphical information to direct users and sites that provide documents in pdf format only.) This is particularly problematic when assessment is internet based and not designed to be accessible, and when research databases and web-based catalogues are not accessible.

### **6.0.1 Recommendation 9**

That public funding of universities be contingent on university web sites complying with the World Wide Web Consortium’s Web Content Accessibility Guidelines 1.0. This includes the web sites of any other teaching organisations that provide courses that are available to students as part of their degree. Funding should also be contingent on universities utilising research resources and tools, for example, databases and catalogues, which comply with the Accessibility Guidelines.

## **Appendix One: Blind Citizens Australia's Education Policy**

## References

Australian Bureau of Statistics (1998) **Disability, Ageing and Carers: Disability and Long Term Health Conditions, Australia 1998**, Catalogue Reference No. 4433.0.

Blind Citizens Australia (1996) **Everybody’s Business: Consumer Information Access for People who are Blind or Vision Impaired**

Department of Community Services and Health (1989), **Report on print disability review**, Disability Services Program: Canberra.