



27 April 2002

The Secretary,
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee
Suite S1.61, Parliament House
CANBERRA, ACT 2600

Dear Sir or Madam,

Attached for your consideration is the submission on behalf of the Council of Australian University Librarians into the Senate Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities.

This submission, in general terms, addresses itself to points 1(a)(v)-(viii):

- v) access to and adequacy of funding and support in both the public and private sectors,
- vi) the nature, extent and funding of programs that provide for full or partial learning opportunities with mainstream students,
- vii) teacher training and professional development, and
- viii) the legal implications and resource demands of current Commonwealth and state and territory legislation.

The submission was prepared on behalf of CAUL by Sue McKnight, Executive Director, Learning Services and University Librarian of Deakin University.

Should you have any questions, or require further information, I may be contacted at diane.costello@caul.edu.au or on 02 6125 2990.

Yours sincerely,

Diane Costello
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SENATE INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Submission on behalf of the Council of Australian University Librarians
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This submission is provided on behalf of the Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL). This peak body's aim is to improve access by the staff and students of Australian universities to the scholarly information resources that are fundamental to the advancement of teaching, learning and research.

Since the first meeting of Australian university librarians in 1928 and the formation of the Committee of Australian University Librarians in 1975, CAUL has sought to ensure a common voice and representation for all university libraries, provide a forum for discussion, and promote common interests. Membership of CAUL is restricted to library directors whose parent institutions are full members of the Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee.

This submission, in general terms, addresses itself to points 1,a, v-viii, of the Committee's Terms of Reference.

General Comments:

There are a number of key issues that confront academic library services for people who have a disability. These are:

- Compliance with the Disability Discrimination Act
- Compliance with other laws and regulations (Copyright, Building Codes etc)
- Staff awareness and training to be sensitive to the needs of those with disabilities, and be able to offer appropriate services
- Knowledge of those staff and students who do require additional assistance from the Library
- Promotion of library services in ways that ensure that people who have a disability understand what services are available and how to access these.
- Funding adequate to ensure that appropriate services are provided to students who have a disability without disadvantaging other students of the university. Libraries require additional funding to ensure adequate staff, equipment and tools to prepare or convert information resources and course materials into multiple formats to improve accessibility for people with disabilities.

However, the overarching issue is to ensure inclusive practices, where reasonably possible, so as to make academic (indeed any) library services sensitive to the needs of people who have a disability and to mainstream, rather than have special, services for them.

The issues outlined above are not unique to academic libraries. However, ensuring an inclusive library service is essential to the education of students with disabilities enrolled in universities.

Funding Issues:

Ensuring inclusive practices will assist in providing adequate educational services to students with disabilities. However, these come at additional costs to university library services.

There are a number of fundamental funding challenges in serving students who have a disability.

- It is very difficult to plan or budget effectively for ensuring accessible information resources as the Library has no control over the number of students with disabilities who may be enrolled in any semester, or what units they will study. Government or institutional funding, rather than library funding, should be provided, otherwise the cost burden of providing these recourses may disadvantage non-disabled library patrons.
- The cost of preparing accessible information resources may be on a one-off basis, as there may not be other students who require the same material in

that format prepared previously. This is in comparison to an assumption that, particularly for undergraduate students, there will be multiple users of the same information resources, thus spreading the costs over a wider user population.

- The estimated cost to Deakin University Library, for example, of serving 40 students with a range of physical disabilities is of the order of \$300,000 pa, in addition to the purchase cost of the information resources required.
- The level of study, in addition to the type of disability, affects the cost of serving a student with a disability. Postgraduate research students, because of their demand for a wide range and large number of information resources, cost considerably more per person than serving a first year undergraduate student.
- It is important that the Senate notes that educational institutions, or their libraries, should not become responsible solely for the retrospective conversion of commercially published information resources and course materials. It is the responsibility of the publishers of textbooks, audiovisual items, journals, and multi-media to ensure that educational institutions have the option of purchasing information resources and course materials in all the alternative formats that students may require.
 - For example, the National Library of Canada has developed a Manager's Guide to Multiple Format Production which (if followed) would permit inclusiveness to be incorporated in the design of courses by educational institutions and in the development of course materials (textbooks, videos, DVDs, journals) by publishers.

An excerpt from the Manager's Guide to Multiple Format Production, National Library of Canada, 2002

Each publication should be produced in such a way that adaptation to another format can be accommodated easily and quickly. This is accomplished through the following steps.

Use Plain Language:

A recent survey by the Decima polling firm discovered that 75% of Canadians find information from government programs too difficult to understand.

Keeping your text as clear and as easy to read as possible is not only beneficial for clients with learning disabilities and low literacy skills, it improves comprehension for all clients and will make adaptation to other formats easier.

All technical terms and acronyms should be fully explained.
- Produce a Full-Text Template:

At the same time a published product is developed, all of the graphical and multi-media elements should be fully explained in text by the original authors. This is called a "Full-Text Template." It is simply a text file that contains all

the original text plus text that describes any non-text content such as pictures, graphs, and even multi-media if applicable. The full-text template is used as the master document from which all other formats can be produced.

Nature, extent, and funding of programs that provide for full or partial learning opportunities with mainstream students:

Australia's universities do provide learning opportunities with mainstream students for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities are accepted into universities with the same criteria for academic accomplishment as their fellow, non-disabled students. However, the funding for students with disabilities must be greater than funding for other students to ensure that their needs are accommodated.

Buildings, including libraries, and campuses must be designed and constructed for inclusive use. Course materials must be designed and produced for inclusive use. Information resources must be converted into accessible formats. Information technology must be adapted as appropriate to the students' needs, and, students from low socio-economic backgrounds must be assisted to obtain and use adaptive technologies that can improve their opportunity to collaborate with 'able' fellow students.

As mentioned above, the amount of funding depends on the type and extent of disability, and on the level of study. Funding requirements also depend on the complexity of the information resources and course materials that need to be provided in accessible formats. For example, complying with accessibility guidelines for electronic resources for complex interactive www environments will require significant financial resources compared to the conversion of an electronic text file into an audio file. A base level of funding, however, needs to be provided to universities to ensure a minimum level of accessibility is provided to students with a disability.

Training and professional development:

University libraries require staff awareness and training to be sensitive to the needs of those with disabilities, and to be able to plan, manage and deliver appropriate services. For example, managers of university libraries should:

- Promote legislation and regulatory requirements, and internal policies and guidelines on inclusive practices so as to ensure development of accessible information resources, services and course materials.
- Conduct regular in-service training on disability awareness, and on the special skills and equipment required to provide appropriate services and support to disabled library users (e.g. on adaptive technologies, locating alternative format material)

- Plan all new services to take into consideration accessibility issues
- Develop a culture amongst staff of service, inclusivity and flexibility
- Promote training of academic staff to develop course materials in multiple formats wherever appropriate rather than the costly and time-consuming process of post-production conversion
- Ensure that library staff are aware of the potential need for communication assistance (e.g. sign interpreters for people who have a hearing disability) and facilitate that assistance if required
- Develop safety and emergency evaluation procedures to ensure that staff and patrons with disabilities are appropriately catered for (e.g. emergency phones are at an accessible height, library staff physically check areas to be evacuated and help those who need assistance, library staff are trained in the correct procedures to follow to ensure the safety of clients with a disability, library staff with disabilities know what procedures will be used to assist them in an evacuation)
- Promote awareness amongst library staff that students with disabilities have a wide variety of needs and that “one size does not fit all”
- Liaise with the organisation’s Disability Resource Centre or equivalent to maintain an awareness of emerging trends, technologies, issues etc so as to inform library planning, policies, procedures and services
- Provide effective communication with all library users, and disability awareness training should highlight the communication issues faced by people with hearing, psychological or intellectual disabilities.
- Establish a liaison librarian position to assist staff and students with disabilities, in a similar way that faculty or discipline librarians operate. This person would also be the primary liaison person for the Disability Resource Centre and for the other library staff
- Promote library services in ways that ensure that people who have a disability understand what services are available and how to access these
- Ensure that signage in academic libraries is clear and easily understood
- Include, in academic library promotional library materials, information on the inclusive and flexible services offered and who to contact if additional assistance is required
- Ensure that orientation tours and lectures are inclusive
- At the commencement of each semester, liaison with the Disability Resource Centre is required to make sure students who have different needs are assisted.

Clearly, the range and complexity of training that is required to ensure that students with a disability are able to access resources appropriate for their learning, required significant additional funding over and above the normal professional training allocations of university libraries.

Legal implications and resource demands of current Commonwealth and state and territory legislation:

University libraries must comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, the Privacy Act, the Copyright Act, and Building codes. In practice, additional resources are required to comply with current legislative requirements.

- The recent amendments to the Copyright Act have enabled academic libraries, under Copyright Agency Limited license, to communicate copyright print material in electronic format to students. However, compliance management is a huge burden. The management and reporting processes should be simplified to make retrospective conversion of information resources and course materials to accessible formats an easier task
- Special vigilance is required to ensure that information resources and course material reproduced and communicated under disability provisions of the Copyright Act is not accessible to other students
- Planning and budgeting for all new buildings and renovations of academic libraries should take into consideration accessibility issues
- Further amendments to the Copyright Act are desired to simplify compliance management, to enable the storage of an electronic document after it has been communicated if there is likelihood that it will be required again
- Investigations into the feasibility of establishing a national electronic database of resources in accessible formats that can be available to disabled students at any Australian university should be undertaken
- Software developers should be encouraged to create affordable applications that can convert non-accessible electronic formats into accessible formats. The requirement will require Australian legislators to seriously consider how copy-protection legislation, such as that currently under consideration in the USA, could negatively impact on the educational opportunities of students with disabilities.

The Privacy Act may preclude identification of the very students who need special services because of their disability.

This is a complex area of management, and one that requires specialist staff resources to ensure that policies and procedures are implemented to comply with all the legal requirements.