



Submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace
Relations, Small Business and Education
References Committee

Inquiry into the Education of Students with
Disabilities

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Glossary of Terms

<i>Abbreviation</i>	<i>Meaning</i>
AAA	Alternative Arrangements for Assessment
CAF	Compulsory Amenities Fee
DE	Distance Education
DEST	Department of Education, Science and Training
DLO	Disability Liaison Officer
DLU	Disability Liaison Unit
FTE	Full time Equivalent
MSA	Monash Student Association
MUACPD	Monash University Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities
OCR	Optical Character Recognition

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Students with disabilities of Monash University
Staff of Monash who contributed to this submission

Executive Summary

Within the context of overall cost shifting to students higher education, vulnerable cohorts have experienced recent reforms more sharply than the general student population. Irrefutably, cost is a major barrier to entry into and success at university. Marginalised students have less capacity to take up additional costs than other students. As a result, they bear cost shifting disproportionately. This is exacerbated by the increasing costs of technological supports. Unmet need is core to the experiences of students with disabilities. The onerous burden of studying with a disability is outlined below.

The current funding model does not promote significantly improved outcomes for this cohort of students. Only perverse outcomes can arise from forcing universities to operate in a public funding squeeze, and provide support services to students with disabilities. This policy framework shifts the balancing point between student need and the unjustifiable hardship test of the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Commonwealth) (The Act)*. This can only have detrimental affects on the capacity of the universities to meet student need. Monash University is a case in point. While comprehensive systems and procedures have been put in place to support students with disabilities, and the University takes its obligations to these students very seriously, they are still enormously disadvantaged by their disability. Primarily, this is a function of the fact that the financial costs of studying with a disability are borne by the student within the context of ever –increasing tuition and ancillary costs.

Exacerbating this policy failure is the ever-increasing number of students with disabilities and the growing complexity of their needs. Improvements to adaptive technologies have provided wonderful new supports to students but also greatly inflated the costs of such supports. Further adding to the precarious position of these students is their reduced capacity to supplement their incomes with part-time work and the restrictive eligibility criteria for income support. This submission argues that equity is thus diminished beyond an acceptable level. In fact, these factors culminate in a contravention of the spirit of *The Act*.

The Monash Student Association (Clayton) Inc. (MSA) is the peak representative body for students on the largest campus of Australia's largest university. As a result, its policy research and commentary can capture the most critical element of good higher education policy development and evaluation – the voice of students. Without this, no education policy

will achieve the desired outputs or outcomes. In this context, the MSA is pleased to have the opportunity to comment on services for students with disabilities. This submission makes a range of policy proposals that will ensure more equitable outcomes for students living with disabilities. Central to these proposals are the dual requirements for urgent review of services for students with disabilities (incorporating their representative bodies) and greater funding targeted to services for these students.

Summary of MSA Recommendations

1. MSA recommends that the federal government thoroughly and immediately review the adequacy of support services for tertiary students with disabilities. The terms of reference for this review should include mechanisms for all universities to be held accountable against a range of agreed key performance indicators that measure the quality of services and outcomes for students. These key performance indicators should be established as part of this review and include more qualitative measures than those employed currently.
 - (a) An innovative and cost effective mechanism for holding the universities to account on these measures would be to fund the campus student associations to research and critique universities' performances.
 - (b) The outcomes of each 'Quality in Students with Disabilities' Outcomes' review should be made publicly available.
2. MSA recommends that an on-going relationship of consultation between students with disabilities, student associations and the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) should be established with in order to adequately meet the support requirements of these students. This will ensure that the unique insights that can only be offered by these students and their associations are included in the policy process.
3. MSA recommends that DEST establish standardised disability verification mechanisms that allow for the general streamlining of procedures. This will also allow students verified at one tertiary institution to be automatically validated for any cross-institutional study.
4. MSA recommends that innovative ways of supporting tertiary students with disabilities be examined by DEST with a view to providing universities with specific project funding for the establishment of:
 - standardised provision of internet and email services via the institution rather than private internet service providers;
 - a 1800 number for voice and data services;
 - literature search and provision of materials to students in alternative formats;
 - broader provision of on-campus adaptive technologies.
5. MSA recommends that the provisions for international student visa conditions and the requirements placed on providers of education to international students be reviewed with particular reference to:
 - the *Migration Legislation Amendment (Overseas Students) Act 2000 (Commonwealth)*;
 - the *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 (Commonwealth)*; and
 - the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students*; andin order to assess, standardise and enforce the equitable treatment of international students with disabilities.

6. MSA recommends that the adequacy and appropriateness of funding for the Royal Victorian Institute of the Blind and Guide Dog Association of Victoria to support tertiary students be thoroughly reviewed.
7. MSA recommends that specific funding be added to university operating grants to maintain a standardised ratio of disability support staff to students with disabilities. This standard should be set in consultation with universities, students and their associations.
8. MSA recommends that the federal government provide funding to student associations on a project basis to fund research and advocacy for students with disabilities. Particular attention should be paid to assisting students with disabilities' involvement in all aspects of university life and educating the university community in relation to living and studying with a disability.
9. MSA recommends that policy initiatives be designed to encourage publishers to provide university libraries with digital copies of academic publications for the use of students with disabilities.
10. MSA recommends that the eligibility criteria and provisions of the Disability Support Pension and the Pensioner Education Supplement be reviewed in the light of ever increasing costs faced by students with disabilities.
11. MSA recommends that the federal government establish a web-published database of all private and public monies available to students with disabilities in terms of bursaries, scholarships and income support.
12. MSA recommends that a federal scheme be established to meet the additional expenses experienced by tertiary students with disabilities. Both start-up grants and on-going support should be available through this means-tested and targeted fund to ensure that the financial costs of studying with a disability are not a barrier to entry or cause of failure for any prospective Australian tertiary student with a disability. Establishment of this policy initiative should be formulated on the basis of the research outlined in previous recommendations.
13. MSA recommends that specific project monies be granted to institutions for staff training in relation to disability issues.

Introduction

This submission to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities (hereafter referred to as the Inquiry) will concentrate on subsections 1 (a) iii) 1(a) v) 1 (a) vii) and 1(b). These sections deal with specific areas of double disadvantage, the access to adequacy of funding and support for students with disabilities, teacher training and the appropriate role of the various levels of government in supporting these students. After introducing the Senators to the MSA and relevant data on Monash's students with disabilities and support services, this submission will tell the story of unmet need in disability support as highlighted by the experiences of Monash students.

MSA

The MSA is an independent service provider and peak representative of students at the Clayton campus of Monash University, formed in 1961 and funded primarily from a compulsory amenities fee (CAF). Bringing the voice of students to higher education policy questions is core to the MSA's service mandate to Monash Clayton students, as is protecting their interests such that their educational opportunities are maximised.¹

The MSA provides students with a range of other services.

Services Provided by MSA

- Short Courses
- Childcare
- Student Newspaper – Lot's Wife
- Student Radio – 3MR
- Orientation to the University for new students
- Host Scheme – camps and on-campus orientation programme for first year students
- Activities (Bands, Comedy Nights etc)
- Clubs and Societies
- Student Rights (individual advocacy for students vis a vis the University)
- Centrelink and other government agency advice
- Support for minority or disadvantaged students ie: Postgraduate students, International students, Mature-Age and Part-Time students, female and Queer students

¹ For a more detailed outline of the MSA's history and mission see MSA (2001) *MSA Submission to Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee: Inquiry into the Capacity of Public Universities to Meet Australia's Higher Education Needs*. Submission 278
http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/eet_ctte/public%20uni/sub%20list.htm

Services Provided by MSA cont...

- Wholefoods (vegetarian and vegan restaurant)
- Second-Hand Book Co-operative
- Student Welfare
- Student Theatre
- Transport and Environment
- Student Representation

The MSA's service and representation mission, coupled with its extensive experience as the voice of students in an ever-changing tertiary sector lends it a unique standpoint on policy issues affecting students. Embracing the student voice is central to ensuring the formulation of successful education policy. The MSA is therefore very pleased to have the opportunity to bring this 'coal face' knowledge to the attention of the Inquiry.

Summary

The MSA is in a unique position to offer an insight to this Inquiry as the peak representative of and service provider to students at Monash Clayton.

Monash University

Monash provides an interesting case study for the adequacy of educational services for students with disabilities, as it is Australia's largest university.² In 1999, Monash taught 42,950 students across ten faculties; Art & Design, Arts, Business & Economics, Education, Engineering, Information Technology, Law, Medicine, Pharmacy and Science.³ Monash is a global, multi-campus institution, with eight campuses (including Malaysia and South Africa) and Centres in Prato and London.⁴ As is readily understandable from these demographics, Monash requires a substantial staff to meet its operational requirements. In 1999, Monash had 4,462 full-time equivalent (FTE) staff.⁵ Understandably, Monash operates on funding from the full range of allowable sources, and on a substantial estimated income of \$534,426,200.⁶

² Monash University, (2000). *Distance Education 2001 A Guide to Courses*. p. 2.

³ Monash University, (2000a). 'Student enrolments by campus (as at 31 March)'. *Statistics 1999*. p. 2. In addition to this, 6,547 subject enrolments were taught by Monash through Open Learning. *Ibid.* p. 2

⁴ Monash University, (2001). *Monash Information*. <http://www.monash.edu.au/info/>

⁵ Monash University, (2000a). *Op. Cit.* p. 3.

⁶ Monash University, (1998). *Budget 1999 and Indicative Budgets 2000 & 2001*. p. 4.

Monash is an extremely varied institution, providing courses at all levels of tertiary education from cross-sectoral courses run in conjunction with Casey TAFE, Open Learning, distance education, to traditional tertiary undergraduate and postgraduate coursework and research.⁷ Internationalisation is also central to Monash's profile. It has been considered the leader in international education since the mid 1990s.⁸

Students with Disabilities at Monash

Not surprisingly, Monash has a large number of students with disabilities. In 2001, Monash had 1,105 students enrolled who self-identified as living with a disability.⁹ This represented 3.2% of Monash's domestic student population. Only one Australian university – the University of Queensland – teaches more students with disabilities than Monash.¹⁰ Monash provides educational services to 5.5% of all domestic tertiary students with a disability.¹¹ Of these students, 344 registered with the Disability Liaison Unit (DLU) for support during 2001. The table below provides a breakdown of the nature of their disabilities and other relevant statistics.

Table 1 Students Registered with the DLU 2001¹²

ATTRIBUTES	NUMBER
TOTAL NO STUDENTS REGISTERED WITH DLU	344
BY DISABILITY	
PHYSICAL	66
VISION	24
HEARING	12
MENTAL HEALTH	55
LEARNING	53
MEDICAL	91
NEUROLOGICAL	43

⁷ Marginson, S. (2000). *Remaking the University Monash*. Melbourne: Allen & Unwin. pp. 161-184.

⁸ *Ibid.* pp. 144-154.

⁹ DEST (2002) *Higher Education Report for the 2002 to 2004 Triennium*. p. 23.

http://www.dest.gov.au/highered/he_report/2002_2004/html/pdf/1_1.pdf

¹⁰ *Ibid.* p. 23.

¹¹ This figure is calculated overall domestic students with a disability, rounded to the nearest thousand. See *Ibid.* p. 18.

¹² DLU statistics.

Table 1 Cont...

BY CAMPUS	
CLAYTON	171
GIPPSLAND (INC DISTANCE EEDUCATION (DE))	94
CAULFIELD	55
PENNINSULA	18
PARKVILLE	4
BERWICK	2
BY FACULTY	
ART + DESIGN	4
ARTS	101
BUS ECO	74
IT	22
EDUCATION	15
ENGINEERING	15
LAW	57
MEDICINE	15
PHARMACY	2
SCIENCE	39
BY MODE OF STUDY	
ON-CAMPUS	282
DE	51
OPEN LEARNING	11
BY STATUS	
PERMANENT	256
FLUCTUATING	82
SHORT TERM	5
BY GENDER	
MALE	142
FEMALE	202
BY SUPPORT WORKERS	32

Disability Support

Under the auspices of its State and Commonwealth equal opportunity and anti-discrimination obligations, Monash provides a broad range of support services to students living with disabilities. In particular, Monash takes very seriously its obligation to promote equality of access for students with disabilities, whilst balancing the reasonableness of requested accommodations and the unjustifiable hardship tests of *The Act*. This is evidenced by the mechanisms put in place to support students, such as:

- the Monash University Disability Action Plan;

- a committee structure consisting of the:
 - Equal Opportunity Committee (a committee of Council);
 - Student Equity and Access Subcommittee;
 - Monash University Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities;
 - Clayton, Caulfield, Peninsula and Gippsland Monash University Advisory Committee for People with Disabilities Subcommittees; and
 - Faculty Equity Committees and Officers; and
- the DLU.¹³

Prospective and new students with disabilities are encouraged to contact the DLU as soon as possible to discuss support requirements. The types of supports offered include those specific to students with disabilities and those generally available to the student population that are of particular interest to students with disabilities.

Specific Services for Students with Disabilities¹⁴

- Application, enrolment and orientation advice;
- Building access information;
- Adaptive technology:
 - Access to library adaptive technology rooms;
 - Limited equipment such as tape recorders and sloping writing boards;
- the Alternative Arrangements for Assessment program (AAA):
 - any required variation in structure, format, venue or duration of an exam including the use of specialised furniture and/or equipment;
- Provision of course materials in alternative formats;
- Interpreters;
- External modem accounts;
- Library services:
 - text/information retrieval;
 - photocopying;
 - extended library privileges;
 - access to the library rest room;
- Note-taking services;
- Disabled parking;
- Rest rooms;
- Personal readers;
- Telephone typewriters;

General Services and Supports

- Merit and Equity Scholarships;
- Support Bursaries;
- Discrimination and harassment procedures;
- Special consideration;

¹³ DLU (2002). *Resource Guide for People who have a Disability or Long Term Medical Condition*. Monash University, <http://www.adm.monash.edu.au/sss/pc/equity/dlu/students/K2-GREEN.pdf> pp. 6-9.

¹⁴ *Ibid.* pp. 5-15.

- Language and Learning;
- Security busses;
- Community Services:
 - Counselling;
 - Financial Aid;
 - Housing;
 - Health Service;
 - Chaplaincy;
- Student Association Services:
 - Student representation;
 - Student Rights.

The following criteria have been established for eligibility for DLU services.

The student must:

- be enrolled in an award course of Monash University
- have a disability, in accordance with the Disability Discrimination Act, (1992)
- provide relevant, current documentation from a professional, qualified practitioner responsible for coordinating treatment or management of their condition. Medical documentation is used to assist the DLU in assessing the student's requirements and in deciding the most appropriate service. Students are assured of confidential assessment. The documentation should be:
 - recent, and in the case of students with a learning disability, not more than two years old;
 - written or typed on letterhead dated, signed, otherwise legible and in English;
 - include a full statement of the nature of the condition, the impact of this on the student's ability to study and the recommended reasonable accommodations in the university context. If requiring additional time in exams for reading, writing or rest breaks, the practitioner should specify the amount required.¹⁵

As is outlined above, Monash has a comprehensive framework for dealing with support obligations for its many students living and studying with disabilities. However, students with disabilities remain disadvantaged in higher education. Given the crisis in higher education public funding, universities are not in a position to greatly assist students with the enormous costs of studying with a disability. Until this unmet need is addressed, students with disabilities will forever remain highly disadvantaged.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* p. 8.

Summary

Monash is Australia's largest university, with a comprehensive approach to disability support. It therefore presents an interesting case study for a review of services for students with disabilities in the tertiary sector.

Despite this, students with disabilities at Monash remain severely disadvantaged. Until students with disabilities are offered substantive assistance with the costs of studying, this will remain the case.

Section 1(a) Adequacy of Current Programs and Policies

Studying with a Disability

What is wrong with the way university works is that everything happens at once. At the time that I need to be expending the physical effort on the nightmare that is essay writing, I also need to be preparing for the nightmare of exams.¹⁶

While the above quote seemingly expresses the frustration of the entire tertiary student body, it is important to be cognisant of how more so it is for students with disabilities. The difficulty of even the simplest tasks in undertaking, continuing and completing a tertiary level course is exacerbated for students with disabilities. It is almost impossible to imagine the difficulty added to any given situation for these students. Additionally, marginalised students, such as those with disabilities, are disproportionately affected cost-shifting. Shifting cost onto students has been well documented as central to recent higher education sector reforms and management decisions of university administrations.¹⁷ It affects students with pre-existing disadvantage very sharply as cost is a primary barrier to participation in higher education.

Three students were interviewed at length during the research phase of this submission. The case studies below outline the magnified difficulties they have endured in order to participate in higher education. Case study identifiers are repeated (ie *Case Study A*) later in the submission to show the comments of the same student related to the later term of reference. The themes that arise from these case studies include:

- the requirement for students with disabilities to organise themselves and their semesters far in advance;
- the extra time, energy and effort required to meet the requirements of the course;
- and the disproportionate affect of many higher education issues on students living with disabilities.

¹⁶ Interview with Student A. Student affected by neck injury resulting from a car accident. Nerve root compression, post traumatic migraine syndrome and chronic pain with mild paralysis in left arm have also resulted from the accident.

¹⁷ See MSA (2001) *Op. Cit.* pp. 58-65. Thies, L., V. Callaghan, and A. Volders, (2000). A Jump Start...First Year Strategies Project Report. Melbourne: Deakin University and McInnis, C. R. James, and R. Hartley, (2000). *Trends in the First Year Experience in Australian Universities*. Centre for Study of Higher Education. Melbourne: University of Melbourne. Academic Development Unit, (2000). *Student Experiences of Poverty at La Trobe University Report to the Student Services Advisory Group*. Melbourne: La Trobe University. Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee. (2001). *Paying Their Way* http://www.avcc.edu.au/news/public_statements/media_releases/2001/Student_Finances_execsum.pdf

Case Study A

Student A is affected by neck injury resulting from a car accident. Nerve-root compression, post traumatic migraine syndrome and chronic pain with mild paralysis in his left arm are all part of his everyday existence. Despite this, he is attempting to complete a Bachelor of Arts.

Some of the most simple yet key aspects of university life cause Student A real hardship. For example, he cannot sit in one spot for long periods. Cramped conditions and poor quality, old seating in lecture theatres worsen his chronic pain. In anticipation of this pain, Student A often takes prophylactic pain-killers. Unfortunately the side effects of these pain-killers include sleepiness, diminished concentration and thirst. Student A's memory was also affected in the accident. As a result, Student A finds it very difficult to assimilate information when on pain-killers. He tape-records all classes and uses a keyboard attached to a palm pilot to take notes in lectures. Unfortunately, the flip-up desks attached to chairs in lecture theatres cannot accommodate his keyboard.

Reading posture exacerbates Student A's pain. This is particularly the case with books, but is problematic with photocopies too. A large reading load is core to Student A's course. Consequently, he has been forced to develop a convoluted methodology for meeting this course requirement. Student A scans readings to then be placed through Optical Character Recognition (OCR) software. This file is then checked for errors and much of the punctuation removed, before it is converted to an audio file via reading software. The file is then burnt to compact disk so that the student can listen to it anywhere. For a six to eight page document, this process can take about two hours, as Student A also cannot spend long periods of time in front of a computer. Once the file is converted to audio, the reading pace is about half of Student A's normal reading pace.

Student A has faced a number of situations while at university that have been affected by his disability. The first of these culminated in a mark dispute. Instructions for a piece of work were altered one week before the due date. Because Student A cannot predict the occurrence of pain episodes, he tends to do as much of this work ahead of time as possible. Consequently, he had already completed this assignment and had moved onto other course requirements. He discussed this situation with the Lecturer who stated that it would be acceptable to hand in the assignment as already completed. Student A did so and was marked down for not following the second set of instructions.

Student A approached the Lecturer again to discuss this. The Lecturer had forgotten the specifics of the previous conversation with Student A. He found this confrontation very stressful as he was suffering from a migraine at the time. Stress exacerbates Student A's pain and he was unable to articulately put his case. He subsequently wrote a letter of complaint to which the faculty did not reply. Student A felt unable to pursue this matter due to the other demands of his workload and ultimately achieved a significantly worse mark for this subject than any other. Student A feels that this dispute would not have arisen if it were not for his disability – or at the very least that he would have been in a stronger position to press his case thereby altering the outcome.

Student A had a strong desire to pursue a discipline which was no longer offered by Monash due to cut backs. He enrolled at another institution to undertake this subject. He discovered that in order to make arrangements for alternative assessment, he would have to provide full medical evidence to the second institution as well. This is despite the fact that the evidence has been accredited by Monash and the student is currently registered with Monash's DLU.

Case Study A cont ...

Re-accreditation will replicate the Monash process and cost the student valuable time and energy. Student A had assumed that the institutions would act co-operatively in this matter.

The institution where the student is studying the cross-credited subject is located very close to the central business district with limited parking. Student A cannot catch public transport from his home due to the length of the journey and the associated pain. However, Student A does not automatically qualify for a disabled parking place. Instead, the university suggested to Student A that he see his Doctor to verify his disability and be assessed for a parking place. After all the medical testing Student A has endured for the fifteen years since his car accident, he decided not to submit himself to this again. Student A now pays \$10 per day in a commercial car park. He parks there two days per week during semester.

Student A usually types his exams. However the cross-institutional language he is studying does not use the English alphabet. As such, Student A will need to write this exam despite the pain-causing posture and the pre-emptive pain killers involved. Studying this language has proven to be very difficult for Student A due to the memory work involved also. He uses computer flash cards to assist his memory.

Student A is in the second year of his degree. He is currently studying part-time because he just cannot cope with a full-time load. This is particularly the case in the light of the additional problems raised by his cross-institutional studies. He did study full-time in first year but ended up on morphine every day by the end of second semester.

Case Study B

Student B is legally blind. She has experienced numerous difficulties while trying to fulfil the requirements of her double degree in Music and Arts. The first major issue confronted by Student B was of course negotiating her way around campus. She spent 3 hours per day for six days with her father memorising the layout of campus and how to find her various classrooms. Subsequently, she spent six full days with a representative from the Victorian Guide Dog Association furthering her mobility around campus. Unfortunately, the only time she was able to secure this assistance was during Orientation Week. As a result, she missed all the social activities which would have facilitated the formulation of friendships and the building of a social support network at university. It was the end of first year before she felt comfortable on campus and had established friendships to alleviate her sense of isolation.

Student B requires all reading materials and music in alternative formats. Braille is the best of these, but it can take up to twelve weeks to produce. The production of braille is undertaken through the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind. The faculty in which the student is enrolled often does not provide the list of required reading until several weeks before the semester.

Student B must be organised well before the beginning of a semester to get her study materials back in time. Faculty supplied reading materials and music are often of poor quality and require re-typing before being converted into braille. This serves to delay matters further.

Case Study B con ...

Student B often does not receive her reading material in braille until several weeks into the semester. This is a major disadvantage to her jeopardising her performance in assignments and examinations and indeed to the inherent quality of her learning, as she can spend much of the semester without the opportunity to learn with any real independence.

Student B also utilises the personal reader service provided by the DLU. She uses this for ten hours per week. Much of the time spent with the personal reader is spent going over materials that in ideal circumstances would have been provided before the outset of semester. Much of this time is spent converting music to braille.

She really requires more support than this but feels that she should not request it. She feels that she is already utilising the limited resources of DLU too much. Additionally, she feels at a disadvantage as there are inevitable delays between identifying a need and the availability of the service. In Student B's words, 'I am always a little bit behind, but I feel it is an imposition to ask for more [help].'

Student B relies on screen reading software to read materials available in digital format. Some departments are excellent at always using email to communicate to students. Student B is very appreciative of this when it is the case.

Student B has faced two very specific situations during 2002 that have disadvantaged her disproportionately as a student with a disability. The first of these was when deciding what subjects to take for 2002. Student B has a keen interest in geography but was unsure of whether or not she would be able to take on the various map reading and field trip requirements. She was unsure where to go for specific advice and gave up the idea as too hard.

Semester 1, 2002 saw the poorly executed implementation of new room allocation software. This resulted in classes that were double booked and/or allocated to inappropriate and overcrowded rooms. While implementing strategic cost management, the allocation system no longer kept classes of a particular faculty within an area close to that faculty. Rather, they could be located all the way across the other side of the campus. Obviously, a blind student is going to have even greater difficulty traversing the campus than the rest of the student body. When classes shifted due to inappropriate rooms or double booking, Student B could not read the note on the door outlining the alternative location. Student B missed her entire first week of classes due to these communication breakdowns.

Case Study C

Student C is a mature-age Masters student living with dyslexia. She was diagnosed during her secondary schooling. She applied to undertake this course after completing a number of subjects via Open Learning during 2000 and 2001. Open Learning accepted her medical evidence and made appropriate accommodations for her to study and perform to the best of her ability in assessment.

She applied to transfer to Monash and was accepted. Student C prepares early for classes and plans to spend 25-30% more time on her university work than the average student. In order to fulfill the requirements of her course, Student C is very reliant on information technology. Word processing, downloadable lecture notes, internet research, printing and photocopying are all of enormous benefit to Student C. In exams, Student C is reliant on a scribe and extra time of ten minutes for every half hour.

Case Study C con ...

Student C has settled into her course well after initial difficulties outlined in section 1 (a) v) (page 27). She has made good friends in her course. As exams approach, she is worried about how to tell her class mates about her disability, as they are sure to notice that her exams are subject to special arrangements. Student C's course is very vocational. She is concerned that awareness of her disability will filter through to potential employers and mitigate against her employment chances. One of her main concerns is that if she is not offered a position at the end of her course, she will never know whether or not discrimination has been involved.

Many of the difficulties outlined in these case studies need not have occurred if greater attention was paid to students' individual needs. This Senate Committee has previously identified the tertiary sector as being in a state of crisis.¹⁸ This crisis is being borne most acutely by the students of the sector. Of these, vulnerable students such as those with disabilities are the most gravely affected. The fault lines that result in situations like the ones outlined above will be examined in greater detail below.

Summary

Studying with a disability can be enormously difficult. It can complicate every aspect of university life. Due to their vulnerable status, the crisis in higher education has a disproportionately large affect on students with disabilities.

Recommendations

1. MSA recommends that the federal government thoroughly and immediately review the adequacy of support services for tertiary students with disabilities. The terms of reference for this review should include mechanisms for all universities to be held accountable against a range of agreed key performance indicators that measure the quality of services and outcomes for students. These key performance indicators should be established as part of this review and include more qualitative measures than those employed currently.
 - (a) An innovative and cost effective mechanism for holding the universities to account on these measures would be to fund the campus student associations, to research and critique universities' performances.
 - (b) The outcomes of each 'Quality in Students with Disabilities' Outcomes' review should be made publicly available.

¹⁸ Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, (2001). *Universities in Crisis*. http://www.aph.gov.au/senate/committee/EET_CTTE/public%20uni/report/

Recommendations con ...

2. MSA recommends that an on-going relationship of consultation between students with disabilities, student associations and DEST should be established in order to adequately meet the support requirements of these students. This will ensure that the unique insights that can only be offered by these students and their associations are included in the policy process.
3. MSA recommends that DEST establish standardised disability verification mechanisms that allow for the general streamlining of procedures. This will also allow students verified at one tertiary institution to be automatically validated for any cross-institutional study.

1(a) iii) The Particular Needs of Students with Disabilities from low socio-economic, Non-English Speaking and Indigenous backgrounds and from Rural and Remote Areas

Students with disabilities face almost endless additional expense in order to study. This will be highlighted in section 1(a) v) (page 27). Moreover, students who fall into multiple equity categories experience the challenges of university life more acutely. The case study below highlights this.

Case Study D

Student D has severe vision impairment and comes from a rural town several hours' drive from Melbourne. In order to undertake his studies the student has had to physically relocate to Melbourne.

This has caused the student considerable anxiety in not having the direct physical support of his family. The nature of the student's disability can mean that it is difficult to form friendships with fellow students and as a result the student has felt isolated.

The student has also had to bear a huge cost in relocating to Monash and having to pay for additional support services ie: home care, and meal preparation. The student has also had to purchase up to \$10,000 worth of equipment to assist him in studying in his home environment.

MSA has previously brought to the attention of this Committee, the particular hardships borne by isolated students living with a disability. The following case study was presented in the *MSA Submission to Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee: Inquiry into the Capacity of Public Universities to Meet Australia's Higher Education Needs*.¹⁹

Case Study – Anna (Distance Education Student Living with a Disability)

Anna is a forty year old individual with a disability which significantly affects her mobility. As a result of injury, it became clear to Anna that she would no longer be able to work in any position which was physically active, she decided to take up study as a mature-age student. Distance education seemed like the perfect option for her. However, Anna has encountered many problems while studying at Monash via distance education, two of which are listed below;

¹⁹ MSA. (2001). *Op. Cit.* p. 47.

Case Study – Anna (Distance Education Student Living with a Disability con...

No free call telephone number for calling campus or remote dial-up internet access was provided. Due to her disability, she is granted free internet access to Monash, but this is of little use to her as a result of the call rates at which she is charged. As Anna lives outside the local area of any Monash campus, she is required to pay long distance call rates every time she calls or connects to the University on the internet.

As a disability student Anna is entitled to a limited literature search via Monash library. However, the costs of photocopying and sending of materials are borne by Anna, thereby reducing the usefulness of this service.

Flexible delivery, general and adaptive technology advances are often cited as greatly promoting access for students from the various equity categories – particularly those who are isolated or living with a disability. However, the existence of flexible learning and technological advances alone cannot achieve the promised equity outcomes. Cost is the most significant factor in lifting participation for students with disabilities. This is the case from both the perspective of the student and the university. As the availability and effectiveness of technological supports increases so too do the costs. This shifts the balancing point between the support and access obligations of the university and unjustifiable hardship as codified in *The Act*. As this balancing point shifts, so too do the costs of supportive equipment onto the student. For very clear reasons, this diminishes rather than promotes access.

A range of policy measures that would assist students with disabilities through tertiary education is outlined below. Particular reference to the measurements that should be put in place to ensure that students with disabilities who fall into multiple equity categories are granted equality of access to tertiary education will also be outlined below.

International Students

While international students neither completely fit the non-English speaking background categorisation, nor was the equity category established with them in mind, they represent an important and growing cohort of students whose needs must be addressed. The MSA has previously raised concerns about the level of support universities offer to their international students. As was noted in an earlier submission to this Committee, international students represent 80% of the MSA Student Rights Service casework in relation to review of poor academic performance, resulting at least in part from inadequate language testing and support

services.²⁰ The Student Rights Service has also noted increasing mental health issues contributing to their poor performance – most commonly depression.²¹ As has been outlined above, students with disabilities bear the negative consequences of public policy failures to a much larger degree than the general student population. This is true also for international students with disabilities.

Obviously, commercialisation in the sector is most advanced in relation to international students. Whereas local students are increasingly being viewed by universities as student/consumers, international students are viewed as consumers first and students second. This, nor the fact that these students are not citizens or permanent residents of Australia, should diminish the obligation of the university to promote equity of access for them. However the balancing point between this obligation and the unjustifiable hardship test in *The Act* is irrevocably shifted where the student in question is purely an income source for the university. At its most crude, hardship becomes unjustifiable where the funding required for support makes educating the student unprofitable. While this potentially places prospective international students in an unenviable position, it is even more problematic for students who develop an illness or disability during the course of their degree. The case study below also highlights the complications ill health can create for international students.

Case Study E

Student E is an international student undertaking a 3-year degree. While studying in Australia the student was diagnosed with a chronic mental health issue. This required the student to seek considerable medical treatment, not covered by Medicare. In order to pay for this treatment the student was required to seek employment to pay for the increasing cost of treatment and living expenses.

The student is currently undertaking his last year and his health has deteriorated to the point that he is having difficulty maintaining employment and keeping up to date with his studies. The student is required to pay \$9,500 by the end of May in order to continue his studies and have access to on-line lecture material.

As the student is an international student he is required to maintain full time study load.

It is likely that this student will be unable to pay the \$9,500 and will have to return home 6 months prior to finishing his course.

The student is also keen to remain in Australia to receive treatment, as he would not be able to receive this type of treatment at home.

²⁰ MSA (2001). Op. Cit. p. 60.

²¹ Review of 2001/2002 exclusions for academic performance case files.

This circumstance is complicated further by the different cultural understandings international students bring to the issues of disability and the various restrictions recently placed on international student visas.²² The coalescence of these various factors affect prospective and current international students. This is of major concern in terms the sustainability of the international market for Australian higher education, which is a major plank of our higher education policy framework.

Summary

The needs of students who suffer any kind of dual disadvantage require particular attention as the issues raised by these disadvantages are magnified.

Recommendations

4. MSA recommends that innovative ways of supporting tertiary students with disabilities be examined by DEST with a view to providing universities with specific project funding for the establishment of:
standardised provision of internet and email services via the institution rather than private internet service providers;
a 1800 number for voice and data services;
literature search and provision of materials to students in alternative formats;
broader provision of on-campus adaptive technologies.
5. MSA recommends that the provisions for international student visa conditions and the requirements placed on providers of education to international students be reviewed with particular reference to:
the *Migration Legislation Amendment (Overseas Students) Act 2000 (Commonwealth)*;
the *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 (Commonwealth)*;
and
the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students*; and
in order to assess, standardise and enforce the equitable treatment of international students with disabilities.

²² Recent changes to visa conditions have restricted international students' rights to study part-time, take leave of absence, complete their degrees at a slower rate and have their academic performance reviewed by the university, taking into account various mitigating circumstances such as illness where subjects have been failed more than once. See the *Migration Legislation Amendment (Overseas Students) Act 2000 (Commonwealth)*; *Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000 (Commonwealth)*, and the *National Code of Practice for Registration Authorities and Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students* at: <http://www.immi.gov.au/students/providers.htm#2> and http://www.detya.gov.au/esos/National_Code/contents.htm

1(a) v) Access to and Adequacy of Funding and Support in both the Public and Private Sectors

*I don't know if I could survive without the adaptive technology paid for by my grant.*²³

The story of disability support in higher education is one of unmet need. All tertiary institutions and students with disabilities are experiencing ever growing costs. Those in multiple equity categories or other specific cohorts are experiencing this from a position of even greater marginalisation, as demonstrated above. The universities are meeting the increasingly expensive support requirements of vastly increased numbers of students with disabilities, while students are funding the expanding costs of supportive equipment. The costs borne by students and universities are outlined below.

Universities

Monash has seen a significant increase in the number of enrolled students with disabilities in recent years. As a corollary to this, so too has the DLU seen a large increase in the percentage of students seeking its services. The range, severity and complexity of the disabilities suffered by these students has also grown. All of this has occurred within the context of decreasing federal support for higher education. This point has been made previously to the Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee. MSA highlighted the fact that Monash's growth in equivalent full-time student units (EFTSU) has outstripped its growth in overall operating income by 6.6% since 1990 and its growth in EFTSU has outstripped its operating grant growth by 56% over the same time.²⁴ The summative commentary of this submission argued that:

As a result, the University's human and physical infrastructure has been degraded over the course of time. This strain has become obvious in a number of sites, such as staff to student ratios, faculty and library budgets. As the data below indicate, these indexes have not kept pace with the University's rate of growth. ... Inevitably, where there is a conjunction of ever increasing student numbers, and decreasing University income per EFTSU, a growing pressure will be brought to bear on the resources available to each student.²⁵

²³ Interview with Student B.

²⁴ MSA. (2001). *Op. Cit.* pp. 24-26.

²⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 24-25.

It cannot be argued that services for students with disabilities have been immune to this degradation or that this circumstance promotes quality outcomes for these students. This situation is exacerbated by the changing profile of student need. The table below traces the change in client numbers at DLU since 1991.

Table 2 DLU Client Numbers²⁶

YEAR	NO OF STUDENTS RECEIVEING DLU SERVICES	% INCREASE FROM PREVIOUS YEAR
1991	29	-
1992	98	279.93%
1993	151	54.08%
1994	238	57.61%
1995	279	17.22%
1996	312	11.82%
1997	338	8.33%
1998	302	-10.65%
2000 ²⁷	323	6.95%
2001	344	6.50%

Table 3 shows number of on-campus Caulfield, Clayton and Peninsula students stating that they have a disability at enrolment, the number of those requesting information about the DLU and the percentage of those who ultimately receive DLU services.

Table 3 % of Students with Disabilities Registered with DLU²⁸

YEAR	NO OF STUDENTS INDICATING DISABILITY	NO OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES REQUESTING INFO RE SERVICES	% CHANGE OF INFO REQUESTS FROM PREVIOUS YEAR	NO OF STUDENTS RECEIVING DLU SERVICES	% INFO REQUESTERS RECEIVING SERVICE
1991	(no data)	122	(no data)	29	23.8%
1992	528	267	118.85%	98	36.7%
1993	696	340	27.34%	151	44.4%
1994	726	326	-4.29%	238	73%
1995	870	377	15.64%	279	74%
1996	1096	475	25.99%	312	65.7%

²⁶ DLU statistics

²⁷ 1999 not available

²⁸ DLU statistics

Table 3 shows a yearly increase in the number of enrolling Monash students indicating that they have a disability between 1991 and 1996. Of these the percentage requesting information about the DLU increased in the majority of years listed. Additionally, the percentage of information seekers ultimately receiving services increased most years. The growth in disability service provision is compounding – with larger proportions of larger student cohorts receiving service. This suggests that the severity of disability is on the increase. All the students interviewed for this submission complained of the rigmarole attached to registering for and receiving services. It can certainly be argued that it acts as a disincentive for any student who can cope without support. Therefore, additional, unnecessary support seeking is unlikely to be a significant factor in these increases. This is confirmed by DLU policy requiring high evidentiary standards before providing a range of clearly restricted supports limited by reliance on the unjustifiable hardship provisions of *The Act*.

Table 4 outlines the increase in utilization of the AAA bearing out the conclusions drawn above. During the period between 1998 and 2000 the use rates of AAA increased by 32%. This also corroborates the above conclusions.

Table 4 AAA Program Usage Rates²⁹

EXAM PERIOD	NO STUDENTS REQUIRING AAA	% INCREASE FROM PREVIOUS EXAM PERIOD
Nov 1998	283	-
June 1999	289	2%
Nov 1999	333	15%
June 2000	376	13%

The above data do not capture the complexity of the disabilities or support requirements of the students seeking DLU services or the level of assessment accommodations required by those students. Indeed the growth in student numbers and the compounded growth in support requirements tells only part of the story about increasing complexity in disability services. The changing nature of the disabilities creates yet more challenges for universities in providing support to students with disabilities. Table 5 indicates how variable the number of students with a particular type of disability can be between academic years, taking enrolment

²⁹ DLU statistics

data from 1995 and 1996. Table 6 demonstrates the same point with 2000 and 2001 DLU registrations data. It is interesting to note also the changes in categorisation of disabilities in such a short timeframe.

Table 5 1996 Enrolment Statistics

DISABILITY AREA	1996 ENROLMENTS	% CHANGE FROM 1995
Hearing	110	+12.2%
Learning	42	+44.8%
Medical	468	+56.0%
Mobility	111	-1.8%
Vision	249	+51.8%
Other	219	+90.4%
TOTAL	1199	+53.1%

Table 6 DLU Registered Students

ATTRIBUTES	2000	2001	% CHANGE
TOTAL NO STUDENTS REGISTERED WITH DLU	323	344	+6.5%
BY DISABILITY			
PHYSICAL	80	66	-17.5%
VISION	19	24	+26.3%
HEARING	15	12	-25%
MENTAL HEALTH	46	55	+19.6%
LEARNING	44	53	+20.5%
MEDICAL	75	91	+21.3%
NEUROLOGICAL	44	43	-2.3%

The data presented in tables 5 and 6, coupled with the growth in the number of students receiving support heightens the strategic planning and funding challenges presented to universities in supporting students with disabilities.

These challenges are by no means small. Semester by semester costs can vary widely. For example, semester 1, 2001 saw the DLU providing student support workers for 29 students

for a total of 233 hours per week.³⁰ The number of students needing support has been shown above to be widely variable. Clearly, the number of contact (or other activities requiring support) hours of each student is yet another complicating factor. For example, by September 2001, the student support worker budget of \$150,000 had blown out by \$12,826.00.³¹ Monash University faces a number of other expenses in relation to disability support, such as the salary costs for the DLU, \$200,000 in minor works, \$20,000 in equipment and \$20,000 for Committee, project work, publicity and other associated costs.³² While the financial and strategic planning imposts on Monash University for disability support are great, the main difficulties these present the University are in relation to their unpredictability. The far more serious story of disability support is the one of unmet student need, as outlined below.

Students

Studying with a Disability above (page 17) outlined the adversity faced by students with disabilities. In particular, the time costs were highlighted. This section will look at the additional expenses faced by students with disabilities, via the medium of revisiting students introduced to the Committee in earlier case studies.

As the Committee is no doubt aware, a direct result of cost shifting to students in the tertiary sector has been an increase in the number of hours spent in paid employment during semester by students.³³ The Monash Clayton students surveyed in 2001 stated that they worked an average of 18.4 hours per week.³⁴ Students with disabilities are obviously less able to supplement their incomes and meet the rising costs of both tertiary study and the adaptive equipment they need with employment. This can be impeded by either the nature of students' disabilities or the additional time imposts of studying with a disability, as outlined above. The impact of this constraint should not be underestimated, particularly in the light of the increasingly restricted provisions of income support for people with disabilities.³⁵

The case studies below highlight the additional expenses encountered by students with disabilities. It is arguable that forcing students with disabilities to meet these expenses is in

³⁰ DLU statistics

³¹ MUACPD Attachment 16/2001.

³² Ibid.

³³ Australian Vice Chancellors' Committee. (2001). *Op. Cit.*

³⁴ MSA. (2001). *Op. Cit.* p. 69.

contravention of the spirit of *The Act*. Access is not enabled where financial barriers to entry are not removed. Failing to address this core issue fails both the individual students affected and the voting and taxpaying public who believe this public good to be promoted by the operations of *The Act*. These policy failings affect all students with disabilities. Those suffering dual disadvantage are affected to a larger degree. The policy prescriptions put in place to address these concerns need to take into account the particular needs of such students.

Case Study A

Start-up and on-going costs are a significant issue for Student A. He invested \$2000 in adaptive technology in order to begin university. This included the following equipment:
Palm pilot with key board;
Software;
Scanner; and
Tape recorder.

Student A relies heavily on downloading electronic materials for reading as this prevents the financial and time costs associated with scanning materials, and converting them to audio via OCR. When he is in significant pain, he is often unable to attend university. He makes this up by listening to his lectures at home, on line, when he is feeling better.

He estimates that his internet costs are 15-20% greater than the average student.

When materials are not available electronically and he is unable to spend the time converting them to audio materials, he pays for this to be done. He cannot afford to do so very often, despite the fact that it is extremely useful and an efficient methodology. During 2001, he was writing an essay primarily on two texts. He scanned and OCRed the materials and then sent them to be converted to audio. These texts totaled 700 pages and cost \$100. If he were to pay for full conversion, it would have cost \$400.

Essay writing presents substantial problems for Student A. The posture required to type whilst referring to reference material (particularly in books) for long periods exacerbates Student A's condition. He requested support in preparing essays – someone to do the typing and book holding under his direction – but this support was refused by the DLU citing the unjustifiable hardship test of *The Act*.

As outlined above, Student A chose not to go through the rigmarole involved in securing a disabled car park at the university where he is studying a cross-institutional subject. Parking is therefore costing him \$20 per week.

He is becoming concerned that he cannot maintain the required study load for his Pensioner Education Supplement. This \$60 per fortnight is vital to making ends meet and covering the general expenses of studying and indeed the specific ones arising from his disability. However, his health is deteriorating and the commitment he has made to study a language at another institution are mitigating against meeting the study load requirements.

³⁵ This comment is made with particular reference to the 2002/2003 federal Budget. See www.fed.gov.au for Budget documentation.

Case Study B

As a vision impaired student, Student B encounters significant additional expense due to her disability. She is very heavily reliant on various adaptive technologies to get through her degree.

Upon beginning at Monash, she purchased a new personal computer with screen reading software, a scanner and printer. Additionally, she purchased a Braille Note, a portable braille computer that can communicate with her personal computer. She states categorically that these technologies alleviate her requirement for a full-time aid.

Student B funded these supports through a \$4,500 scholarship from the Royal Victorian Institute for the Blind a \$10,500 grant from the Futures for Young Adults program. Without this financial assistance, she would not have been able to meet the costs of these necessary supports.

Student B is aware of only one adaptive technology room on campus. When she went to use it, she discovered that it did not have the current version of JAWS (screen reading software) on it. Her Braille Note could not communicate with this computer. This made the adaptive technology room useless to her. Student B stated that she feels this is unfair as the general student population has access to computers all around campus.

Student B resides on campus. As mentioned above, she is highly dependent on information technology for adaptive purposes. She researches on the internet a great deal. Monash Residential Services have established a telephony system that charges at a timed rate for local calls. While students with disabilities can apply for external dial-up modem accounts (allowing them to avoid faculty set limits for internet usage) this is of little use to Student B as internet research creates an excessive telephone bill. This has not been taken into account by the University.

Case Study C

In order to meet the up-front fee and other associated expenses, Student C took out a \$4000 loan. She gave up her full-time employment in order to undertake the course. Her on-going financial requirements are being met by her partner.

On application, Student C stated that she had a disability. She was informed by the University that she would need to provide documentation in order to be eligible for support services or accommodations.

Student C approached the DLU in week 1 of semester 1 to seek assistance. Seeking a scribe for exams and wanting her disability validated by the DLU so that she could inform Lecturers immediately of her problems, she was aware that early action would facilitate this.

At her first meeting with the DLU, she discovered that her documentation needed to be less than two years old. She had been diagnosed with dyslexia in 1988. She had undertaken eight separate tests, where two were standard. To the best of her knowledge no significant changes had occurred in dyslexia testing, nor had anyone ever recovered from this condition. The requirement that the tests be within the last two years seemed very arbitrary to Student C.

Case Study C cont...

This was especially the case when she discovered that she would be required to finance the re-testing at \$400 - 500. She was unable to afford testing. As an alternative, the student also sought assistance from Language and Learning services, however Language and Learning are unable to assist due to a lack of skills in working in the area of learning disabilities.

Student C rates the stress of dealing with this situation, in the light of the sacrifices she has already made to come to university, as very high. In terms of financial stresses, she rates it as equivalent to selling a home, purchasing a new one and moving. This was exacerbated by the fast approaching deadlines for continuous assessment, exam preparation and the already passed withdrawal from subjects without penalty date. She felt herself placed in an unenviable position without sufficient university support, despite her status as a full-fee paying student.

Student C spent the first five weeks of semester in limbo and in serious concern for her academic future. Eventually, she borrowed the additional monies to pay for testing.

Student C's disability also has significant impact upon her on-going study expenses. She relies on researching on-line electronic materials to prepare for lectures and assessment tasks. Due to her flawed memory, she retains all materials.

She photocopies where the materials are not available electronically. Additionally, she prints all assessable work more than other students, as proof reading is very difficult for her. All up, she estimates the expenses she incurs due to her reliance on electronic and photocopied materials to be 30% greater than the average student.

Summary

Universities are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the needs of an ever growing cohort of students with ever more complex disabilities. In the context of reduced federal funding for tertiary education, the balancing point between student support requirements and unjustifiable hardship has shifted to the detriment of students with disabilities.

This coupled with advances in adaptive technologies, has shifted enormous costs onto students with disabilities, who are less able to supplement their incomes with part-time work and face very stringent tests for income support.

This circumstance is in contravention of the spirit of *The Act*.

Immediate and thoroughgoing review of services for students with disabilities is required.

Recommendations

6. MSA recommends that the adequacy and appropriateness of funding for the Royal Victorian Institute of the Blind and Guide Dog Association of Victoria to support tertiary students be thoroughly reviewed.
7. MSA recommends that specific funding be added to university operating grants to maintain a standardised ratio of disability support staff to students with disabilities. This standard should be set in consultation with universities, students and their associations.
8. MSA recommends that the federal government provide funding to student associations on a project basis to fund research and advocacy for students with disabilities. Particular attention should be paid to assisting students with disabilities' involvement in all aspects of university life and educating the university community in relation to living and studying with a disability.
9. MSA recommends that policy initiatives be designed to encourage publishers to provide university libraries with digital copies of academic publications for the use of students with disabilities.
10. MSA recommends that the eligibility criteria and provisions of the Disability Support Pension and the Pensioner Education Supplement be reviewed in the light of ever increasing costs faced by students with disabilities.
11. MSA recommends that the federal government establish a web-published database of all private and public monies available to students with disabilities in terms of bursaries, scholarships and income support.
12. MSA recommends that a federal scheme be established to meet the additional expenses experienced by tertiary students with disabilities. Both start-up grants and on-going support should be available through this means-tested and targeted fund to ensure that the financial costs of studying with a disability are not a barrier to entry or cause of failure for any prospective Australian tertiary student with a disability. Establishment of this policy initiative should be formulated on the basis of the research outlined in previous recommendations.

1(a) vii) Teacher Training and Professional Development

*The biggest problem I have with my disability the fact that it is invisible. People are less willing to accept that you have limitations when they can't see them*³⁶

Students with invisible disabilities often still encounter prejudice and discrimination in the tertiary sector. Monash has an established process of verifying students' disabilities, ensuring that students do not miss out on the accommodations they require due to variable levels of knowledge about particular disabilities among teaching and support staff. However, this process could be made both more effective and efficient if the DLU had the opportunity to undertake greater levels of project work and training.

Project work examining the nature, variety and experiences of Monash students with disabilities would assist the University community to better understand and accommodate those students. Specifically, capturing the data of why students who identify as living with a disability chose not to seek out support and whether or not this disadvantages their academic performance would be of great interest.

Disability is multifaceted and the body of knowledge around it is constantly changing. This coupled with the growing number of students at Monash with disabilities, and the ever increasing variety and complexity of their disabilities, requires staff of the University to be trained and re-trained regularly. It is too much to expect that staff can deal appropriately with the various issues raised by students with disabilities if they are not provided with a good working knowledge of their obligations and indeed the opportunities working with these students can create. Unfortunately, the staffing levels within the DLU cannot accommodate any genuinely proactive training, project work or research roles.

Summary

Constant training is required to ensure that teaching and ancillary professionals are abreast of the requirements of *The Act* and the changing body of knowledge surrounding disability.

Recommendations

13. MSA recommends that specific project monies be granted to institutions for staff training in relation to disability issues.

³⁶ Interview with Student A.

Section 1(b) Proper Role of Various Levels of Government

Responsibility for improving disability support within the tertiary sector lies most appropriately with the federal government. There is a strong argument to suggest that requiring the universities to meet the support needs of students in the context of ever diminishing public funding and growing numbers of students with increasingly complex disabilities will lead to perverse outcomes. The case studies above highlight the most important of these – cost shifting onto the students themselves. As has been argued above, this is tantamount to preventing access to tertiary education. Given that funding tertiary education is a federal responsibility and that the policy outcomes outlined above require additional funding, the federal arena is the only logical site of these reforms. Additionally, this will ensure uniform standards across Australia and truer realisation of equity goals. All of the recommendations listed in this submission rest most logically with the federal government.

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Authorship

This submission has been prepared by Ms Michelle King on behalf of the Monash Student Association. Ms King is employed as the Student Rights Officer. This submission has been authorised at the highest level of the organisation, by the President.

Michelle King
Student Rights Officer
Monash Student Association
03) 9905 3126
Michelle.King@adm.monash.edu.au
PO Box 10
Monash University
Clayton
Vic 3800

Rebecca Tomilson
President
Monash Student Association
(03) 9905 3141
Rebecca.Tomilson@adm.monash.edu.au
PO Box 10
Monash University
Clayton
Vic 3800