

**SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE EMPLOYMENT,  
WORKPLACE RELATIONS AND EDUCATION  
REFERENCE COMMITTEE**

**INQUIRY INTO THE EDUCATION OF  
STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES**

**New South Wales Department of Education and Training**

**May 2002**

## **1. Introduction**

The last thirty years has seen a shift in emphasis and demand for services for people with disabilities. The New South Wales Government has responded to this trend and to the changing legislative framework at both the Commonwealth and State levels.

The movement to a more holistic or 'whole of life' approach to the delivery of services to people with a disability is requiring increased levels of collaboration and co-ordination between governments and across government departments. As these departments seek to better integrate their services and programs into 'whole of life' packages of support for people with disabilities there will be an increasing focus on health, accommodation, income support, education and training and other support needs. While this national and state approach will ultimately improve the effectiveness and efficiency of supports to people with disabilities there is also a need to recognize the budgetary implications of such whole scale reform.

Within this unfolding context, the NSW Department of Education and Training delivers a range of education and training services from early intervention and transition to school programs through to vocational education and training in school and TAFE and transition to employment services.

## **2. Range of Services**

All education and training services need to respond to and reflect the diversity of the population. The effects of a disability can be compounded by other factors which impact on learning outcomes, such as the student's cultural and linguistic background, particularly Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander background, and the socio-economic status of a student's household.

In NSW, these factors are recognized and considered in the delivery of educational and training services to students with disabilities.

Within the context of its legislative framework, the NSW Department of Education and Training provides a wide range of programs to support students with disabilities in the school sector. These include early intervention services, itinerant teacher services, special classes in regular schools and special schools. In addition, the Department provides a range of vocational education and training programs to support the transition of students with disabilities from secondary school into post school destinations. In the TAFE NSW sector, available learning supports include tutors, interpreters and note takers as well as the provision of adaptive technology.

People with disabilities are increasingly demanding access to services that fully embrace the range of education and training opportunities available to the general population. In recent years this demand has resulted in an exponential increase in the resources allocated to support students with disabilities enrolled in regular school classes. This has placed increasing pressure on the state budget. It has also placed increasing expectations and pressure on regular class teachers, schools and systems to respond to the often diverse needs of students with disabilities within this setting.

### **3. The Changing Landscape**

The traditional concept of special education as a range of services and provisions that parallel those accessed by the general student population, is now under question. It is no longer comfortably accepted by communities in general that students with disabilities will access educational provisions that are seen to restrict their life chances in building personal and economic independence and enhancing social mobility.

This changing community expectation is reflected in national legislative frameworks around discrimination (Disability Services Act), education and training reform (National Training Reform) and welfare reform (the McClure social welfare report). The Commonwealth policies and related initiatives that focus on welfare and economic reform are now changing and shaping the education and training services accessed by people with disabilities. Within this context, 'whole of life' planning and the co-ordination of service provision to people with disabilities has begun to emerge.

Education and training is recognized as a critical component of the reforms and therefore it cannot be delivered in isolation, particularly where individuals also access ongoing support for their health, housing, income support and other needs. For a universally available and accessible education and training system to be effective there needs to be a national approach to bringing together various services and programs that support people with disabilities throughout their life.

Economic reform must enhance the lifestyle outcomes of all citizens, including people with disabilities, as well as building the economic capacity of the nation. Vocational education and training is critical in this sense in that it gives people with disabilities the tools to build economic and personal independence, and make their own contribution to society and to the economy.

The development and implementation of national strategies to support the participation of people with disabilities in vocational and education training has also served to increase the expectations of students with disabilities that they will have access to the full range of education and training provision, particularly in the later years of secondary school and in their transition to further training and employment.

This changing landscape is placing ever increasing demands on public resources to be used to develop, adapt and expand education and training provisions so that they more effectively respond to the educational needs of students with disabilities. The accommodations that are increasingly being required by these students are challenging curriculum design and development, technology, the skills and abilities of staff, the design of facilities, the interface across government departments and services particularly those that impact on transport, employment services, welfare services and para health provisions.

The challenge for Commonwealth and state education authorities is to respond to these challenges within the context of complex policy and service overlays and Commonwealth/State funding mechanisms that are moving to 'broadbanding' of grants to states. 'Broadbanding' removes the restrictions on targeted funding and puts the onus on the states to prioritise and further fund any expansion of services. States are increasingly being expected to do more within available budgets. This is

becoming increasingly difficult because of the diversity and complexity of accommodations now being required by students with disabilities.

#### **4. The Role of Governments**

Commonwealth funding for schools is based in the priority of ensuring equity among all schools and addressing issues of national significance. Funding for students with disabilities must therefore be a central aspect of any Commonwealth funding framework.

The main provider for students with disabilities is the public education system, and this should be recognised in the funding arrangements with the Commonwealth.

As the universal providers, government systems will necessarily carry the costs of ensuring that all students have a genuine opportunity to receive quality schooling. This role carries the specific responsibility of ensuring quality provision for students with disabilities. These costs are borne directly by state governments through the provision of services.

Adequate provision for students with disabilities necessarily entails a strong and well funded government education system.

Currently there is an inadequate recognition of equity factors in the allocation of recurrent Commonwealth funding for government schools. These factors include the needs of students with a disability. Part of the reason for this rests with the reliance on an average government expenditure measure as the reference point for Commonwealth funding of government and non-government schools.

Average Government School Recurrent Costs (AGSRC) is the common standard against which Commonwealth funding is allocated. AGSRC is an effective method of ensuring that the Commonwealth's contribution to the costs of schooling stay in proportion to the contribution of States and Territories. As an indexation measure it therefore has general support.

As a representation of the actual costs of schooling the AGSRC does not reflect the costs for students with different needs. It does not provide an adequate way of understanding and measuring expenditure for different student groups (such as students with disabilities) in different schools and sectors.

Establishing an effective framework for analysing need across schools and sectors requires common definitions and data collation processes to reflect how these costs change across schools and sectors over time.

More work needs to be done on the development of common definitions for disability and approaches to the measurement of the cost of meeting the needs of students with disabilities. In this respect the importance of the work currently being undertaken by the MCEETYA Performance Monitoring Taskforce is acknowledged.

In order for our funding frameworks to be informed by the relative weight of different cost factors across school sectors, more information is clearly needed on these factors

and their relative weightings. At the July 2001 meeting of MCEETYA Ministers endorsed the need for research into the issue of school funding.

A major national project *Resourcing the National Goals* is currently being undertaken by the MCEETYA Schools Resourcing Taskforce. The Taskforce has been asked to provide Ministers with advice on the appropriate level of public funding for different schools and systems to achieve the *National Goals for Schooling*. Analysing the costs of meeting the needs of students with disabilities across different schools and sectors is an integral aspect of this work.

The education of students with disabilities is a matter of national significance and vital to the achievement of the *National Goals for Schooling*. For all students to be in a position to achieve the *Goals*, a national funding framework must recognise the primacy of supporting schools and systems on the basis of an understanding of the distribution of cost factors such as students with disabilities. A strong and well supported public education system is crucial to this objective.

## **5. Recommendations**

- That the Committee recognise the importance of a strong and diverse public education system as the basis for comprehensive provision for all students, including those with disabilities.
- That the Committee recognise the need for establishing an effective framework for analyzing needs across schools and sectors which includes common definitions and data collation processes to inform and guide the resource allocation process.