



SOUTH AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT SUBMISSION

**Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education
References Committee**

Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities

Summary

The South Australian Government, through the Department of Education, Training and Employment, is dedicated to the provision of high quality learning, teaching, care, employment and youth services within an integrated, responsive and supportive learning organisation which strives for continuous improvement in service and performance.

This submission provides information on the legislative frameworks that shape the education of children and students with disabilities and describes current policies, programs and support services that facilitate the access, participation and achievement of children and students with disabilities in departmental sites. The department is dedicated to the provision of opportunities to all students on an equitable basis and supports the achievement of children and students with disabilities and learning difficulties in a broad and balanced curriculum.

The submission also describes the work in progress within the department to review the current Students with Disabilities Policy. It includes proposed changes to processes and mechanisms to ensure the provision of equitable resourcing to those with similar need across education settings and/or geographical location. As over 90% of parents of students with disabilities enrol their children in mainstream schools, it is paramount that resources are provided to children and students based on identified need and not according to particular site placement or location.

1. Introduction

The South Australian Department of Education, Training and Employment (DETE) provides preschool services, general primary and secondary education, alternative schools and centres for children and students with additional needs, specialist schools and support services. Its responsibilities entail the administering of family day care and outside school hours care on behalf of the Commonwealth and licensing and regulating the child care sector in South Australia.

1.1 Legislative context

Within the Department of Education, Training and Employment, care and education services have been influenced by anti-discrimination legislation at both the federal and state level.

Significant examples include Federal legislation such as the *Disability Discrimination Act* (1992) and the *Disability Services Act* (1986), and state legislation such as the *Equal Opportunity Act* (1984) and the *Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act* (1986), and the *Disability Services Act* (1993).

The South Australian *Education Act* (1972) and the *Children's Services Act* (1986) also provide guidance in the care and education of children and students with disabilities.

1.2 Departmental policy

The DETE Policy Statement, Students with Disabilities (1991) (**Appendix 1**), and related Collaborative Action Plan (**Appendix 2**) outlines the responsibilities of all departmental personnel to provide an appropriate curriculum and to ensure an effective delivery of services to students with disabilities. These policy statements affirm that:

- the neighbourhood school is the first point of contact for initial enrolment
- a range of educational options will be provided for all students to access, participate and achieve in the curriculum
- special schools and statewide services are centres of expertise
- parents and their advocates are significant participants in their child's education
- collaboration with other community agencies will ensure effective service delivery.

The current policy is relevant to children and students with a disability within DETE schools only.

One of the aims of the policy is to ensure that all staff of the department understand their obligation to minimise the impact of disabilities on learning outcomes, to eliminate discrimination and to inform families and the school community of the principles and processes which will ensure this occurs.

The Students with Disabilities Policy (1991), developed prior to the amalgamation of the Education Department and the Children's Services Office in 1993, is currently under review. The revised policy, which will encompass both children and students in DETE preschools and schools, will address issues relating to organisational restructures within the department and the introduction of the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act.

It will also result in a more consistent and coordinated approach to meeting the educational needs of children and students with disabilities through the development of models of equitable resourcing to children and students with similar needs, regardless of different education settings and geographical locations.

**Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education References
Committee
Inquiry into the Education of Students with Disabilities**

Terms of Reference

- 1) Inquire into the education of students with disabilities, including learning disabilities, throughout all levels and sectors of education, with particular reference to:
 - (a) whether current policies and programs for students with disabilities are adequate to meet their education needs, including, but not limited to:
 - i) the criteria used to define disability and to differentiate between levels of handicap
 - ii) the accuracy with which students' disability related needs are being assessed
 - iii) the particular needs of students with disabilities from low socio-economics, non-English speaking and Indigenous backgrounds and from rural and remote areas
 - iv) the effectiveness and availability of early intervention programs,
 - v) access to and adequacy of funding and support in both the public and private sectors
 - vi) the nature, extend and funding of programs that provide for full or partial learning opportunities with mainstream students,
 - vii) teacher training and professional development
 - viii) the legal implications and resource demands of current Commonwealth and state and territory legislation
 - (b) what the proper role of the Commonwealth and states and territories should be in supporting the education of students with disabilities.

Response

- i) ***CRITERIA USED TO DEFINE DISABILITY AND TO DIFFERENTIATE BETWEEN LEVELS OF HANDICAP***

Preschool Sector

Within the Preschool Sector, the Services for Children with Special Needs Policy Statement (1987) (**Appendix 3**) describes children with additional needs arising from disability, developmental delay, gifted development or family and social circumstances.

Children with additional needs in DETE children's services must have one or more of the following to be eligible for additional support and resources:

- a level of functioning at least 12 months below usual development in one or more developmental areas (emotional, social, intellectual or physical)
- a diagnosed disability
- significant behavioural difficulties
- a diagnosis of severe speech and/or language impairment
- a need for significant additional support to meet their developmental needs and/or enable effective participation.

This group is broader than the usual definition of disability due to diagnoses of disability often being unclear at this young age, despite children's need for additional support being clearly apparent. The policy provides support and/or resources to ensure that children have access to, and the opportunity for meaningful participation in children's services, and that learning outcomes are maximised.

In South Australia, classification of disability in early childhood as compared with developmental delay/additional need is not required, as the emphasis is on the level and type of support needed. Categories used to describe the type of additional need are contained in **Appendix 4**.

Table 1: Total Number of Funded Children with Additional Needs in Preschools 2001

TOTAL PRESCHOOL POPULATION	NUMBER OF FUNDED CHILDREN	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL PRESCHOOL POPULATION
18,226	1,080	5.9%

Table 2: Total Numbers of Children with Additional Needs by Type, 2001

DISABILITY TYPE	NUMBER CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS	AS % OF TOTAL PRESCHOOL POP. 18,226 CHILDREN
Intellectual Impairment	87	0.47
Communication and Language	790	4.30
Physical Impairment	32	0.17
Severe multiple	17	0.09
Visual Impairment	10	0.05
Hearing Impairment	17	0.09
Autism Spectrum Disorder	38	0.21
Emotional/social/behavioural	67	0.36
Other (health support and physical safety)	22	0.12
TOTAL	1080	5.90%

School Sector

The DETE Students with Disabilities Policy (1991) defines students with disabilities as having "Physical, intellectual, or sensory impairments and/or disabilities in communication and language."

Category descriptors for Intellectual Impairment, Communication and Language Disability, Physical Impairment, Visual Impairment, Hearing Impairment within the DETE Students with Disabilities Policy (1991) are contained in **Appendix 5**.

Table 3: Total Number of Students with Disabilities in Primary and Secondary Schools, 2000

SECTOR	STUDENT POPULATION	NUMBER STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION
R-7	115,415.8	7,078.2	3.98%
8-12	62,061.6	3,786.0	2.13%
TOTAL	177,477.4	10,864.2	6.11%

Table 4: Total Numbers of Students with Disabilities Type, 2000

DISABILITY TYPE	TOTAL	SWD AS % OF TOTAL SCHOOL POPULATION OF 177,477 STUDENTS
Intellectual Impairment	2,098.6	1.18%
Communication and Language	7,454.4	4.20%
Physical Impairment	558.2	0.31%
Visual Impairment	267.0	0.15%
Hearing Impairment	485.8	0.27%
TOTAL	10,864.2	6.11%

Within the Department of Education, Training and Employment, support levels for each student with a disability in relation to their access, participation and achievement in education are assigned by district disability services in consultation with the student's school, rather than differentiating between levels of disability (handicap).

Support levels for the school students with a disability are outlined in **Appendix 6**, while support levels for preschool children with additional needs are outlined in **Appendix 7**.

Vocational Education and Training Sector

Consistency of definitions of disability is important for successful policy development and the planning of programs to address the needs of people with a disability in the VET sector.

In the VET sector, the identification of students with a disability is based on self-identification and reporting at enrolment times. The enrolment forms used by training providers contain a question that asks students to identify whether they have a disability and the type of disability.

Anecdotal evidence, coupled with the high number of students who did not indicate whether they had a disability or not on their enrolment forms (20%), has led training providers and policy makers to deduce that the current data collection processes do not adequately represent the number of students with a disability in VET.

The effect of the current data collection process is that it is not possible to obtain adequate data on the performance of individual students with a disability in the VET sector, and the performance of the VET sector in addressing the needs of this group, thereby making it difficult for comprehensive planning to occur around the needs of students with a disability.

In the TAFE system in South Australia, new approaches to collecting enrolment data have been instituted. Linked with the strategy, an educational campaign has been used to promote the value of disclosing disability status at enrolment. The results of this strategy will be apparent in the 2002 data.

However, further work needs to occur to improve data availability and quality.

Another issue associated with the process of identifying students with a disability in the VET sector is that the definitions of disability used by the sector and by the Australian Bureau of Statistics differ, making meaningful comparisons between the two sets of data difficult.

Comments

There is no common agreement across Australian states and territories concerning policies and eligibility criteria for children and students with disabilities, additional needs and learning difficulties.

Historical inconsistencies among the states and territories and emerging issues, including recent legislative changes such as the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (1992), have led most jurisdictions in recent years to review their policies and practices regarding provision for students with disabilities.

The DETE Students with Disability Policy is currently being updated to reflect the definition of disability within the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (1992) (**Appendix 8**) and the changing structure of the provision of children's services and education in South Australia.

Definition

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) has a broader definition of disability than that of the DETE Children with Special Needs Policy Statement (preschool) and the Students with Disability Policy (schooling). It contains seven different categories, which in themselves produce different cohorts of students being defined as students with disabilities.

The DDA definition of disability moves beyond state definitions by including reference to a wider range of disabilities, imputed disabilities and possible future disability. It also includes:

- the presence in the body of disease causing organisms
- a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction learning disabilities
- a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour psychiatric conditions.

In the draft Regulatory Impact Statement on the proposed Education Standards under the Disability Discrimination Act, Section 5.2 following the DDA definition of disability states that "To date no survey has been conducted of the number of students who fall within this definition. The numbers who might claim a disability under elements (f) and (g) are especially problematic."

While there may be no single survey to quantify the number of students who may fit within the definition of disability under the DDA, a number of education providers have conducted thorough literature searches to estimate the additional number of students included in the DDA definition of disability.

South Australia has investigated research into the prevalence of children and students with disturbed behaviour (section (g) of the definition of disability within in the DDA). Data from Western Australia (Zubrick et al., 1995) estimated between 16% and 21% of young people experience mental health and associated behaviour problems.

Data from the National Survey of Mental Health and Wellbeing (Sawyer et al., 2000) provides a more conservative estimate of approximately 14% of young people aged between 4 and 17 years may experience emotional and behavioural disturbances associated with a mental health problem.

National and international research estimates regarding the incidence of additional needs in children includes:

- 10-15% of all children - includes behavioural disorders, disability, developmental delay (P. Foreman, 1996. "Integration and Inclusion in Action")
- 10-15% children are affected by mental health problems alone (Australian Early Intervention Network for Mental Health in Young People, 2000 "Early Intervention In Conduct Problems").

The National Survey of Young People's Mental Health Australia 2000 estimates between 10% and 14% of all children have a diagnosable mental health illness, disorder or problem. All these children and students would therefore be eligible as a student with a disability under the DDA for accommodations to support them in their learning.

The Students with Disability Policy does not currently specifically cover students with a range of medical needs, psychiatric conditions, challenging behaviours or learning difficulties. DETE does however provide per capita support, support services and crisis intervention funding to schools that support many of these students. A description of these provisions is contained in **Appendix 9**.

The Commonwealth's definition of disability that is included in the Guidelines for allocating Special Education Grants, the *Commonwealth Programmes for Schools Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2001 to 2004*, states:

'A child with a disability means a child who has been assessed by a person with relevant qualifications as having an intellectual, sensory, physical, social or emotional impairment or more than one of those impairments to a degree that:

- if the child is of school age, satisfies the criteria for enrolment in special education programs or services provided by the government of the State in which the child resides
- if the child is below school age, would satisfy those criteria upon reaching that age.

Children whose only impairments are specific learning difficulties or for whom remedial education or remedial support is appropriate are not eligible.' (p 77)

This definition is not congruent with the definition of disability within the Disability Discrimination Act with which all education providers must comply.

ii) THE ACCURACY WITH WHICH STUDENTS' DISABILITY RELATED NEEDS ARE BEING ASSESSED

In the DETE schooling sector, students with disabilities are assessed and identified by guidance officers (educational psychologists) or speech pathologists as eligible for support as students with disabilities. District support staff then allocate a level of support in consultation with the student's school, based on the educational needs of the student as identified in the guidance officer or speech pathologist's report. Statewide specialist support services may also assist with assessment.

In the DETE preschool sector, support is provided for children with additional needs as determined by special educators (specialist teachers) who are members of the Early Childhood Support Services team. Eligibility for support is based on assessment by departmental special educators, speech pathologists and psychologists and other government and non-government speech pathologists and psychologists and paediatricians. Special educators allocate levels of support.

With the revision of the policies covering children and students with disabilities and developmental delay, all special education resource allocation processes are currently being updated to ensure more transparent, coherent and congruent policies and processes are developed based on children's and students identified educational and care needs.

This model is based on the development of an Educational Needs Framework. The framework aims to:

- ensure there are transparent, consistent and predictable eligibility criteria, identification processes and resourcing mechanisms for children and students requiring additional support and specific measures to facilitate learning outcomes
- provide equitable resourcing to those with similar support needs irrespective of pre school or schooling setting or geographical location
- increase the efficiency of the eligibility, identification and resource allocation process
- ensure funding can follow the student
- ensure funding is available to manage risks and crisis situations.

An integral part of the Educational Needs Framework is the Student Education Profile (**Appendix 10**). This profiling tool/questionnaire (in trialling phase) allows school personnel, parents and students to identify support needs to enable successful learning. The information will then be used to determine the level of additional support required to be allocated for students eligible for funding. This support may be either program support or curriculum support (**Appendix 11**).

iii) THE PARTICULAR NEEDS OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES FROM LOW SOCIO-ECONOMIC, NON-ENGLISH SPEAKING AND INDIGENOUS BACKGROUNDS AND FROM RURAL AND REMOTE AREAS

There is difficulty in separating broad educational disadvantage issues from cultural and disability specific issues. For instance in rural or remote areas some students with disabilities are limited in or unable to access appropriate programs, frequent or regular high quality services, multi-agency and or community support teams.

The state only has two rural centres with a population of 20,000 and consequently specialist services are difficult to obtain and maintain. This has led to specialist staff travelling long distances from metropolitan sites to country areas because of the difficulty in recruiting and retaining staff. Because of these difficulties some collaborative arrangements (job sharing) have been negotiated with other departments such as Health to alleviate shortages. The use of distance technology is emerging as a solution to these issues, for example, tele-medicine, video conferencing for intensive intervention, on line training and development, web sites for information for staff and families.

Availability of specialised transport is often problematic to ensure students access to particular curriculum opportunities such as work experience.

Transience and Students with Disabilities

In 2001, the Department of Education, Training and Employment undertook a preliminary investigation into the issue of transience and students with disabilities. A paper, *'Transience and Students with Disabilities: Conversations with the field'*, reported on discussions with a small sample of relevant central office, district and site based personnel (**Appendix 12**).

Findings included the following:

- DETE schools have a transience rate of students with disabilities of approximately 30%
- in the vast majority of cases transience of students with disabilities is closely linked with poverty
- the impact on students, schools and the system of transience of students with disabilities is significant, for example:
 - the reason for moving can have an unavoidable emotional impact on the family and child which can then compound existing issues related to student learning and behaviour
 - continual movement can result in the curriculum and social needs of the student not being identified and/or met
 - impact on schools relate to resourcing and provision of support for students. These issues can be compounded further with delays in transfer of information from one school to the next
 - transience places significant pressure on the system in relation to records management, assessment of students, placement, provision of

- resources (human and physical) and appropriate programs, provision of training for staff and transport
- a range of actions are currently addressing the issue of transience and students with disabilities including:
 - the development of a central data base of students with disabilities
 - the development of an electronic Negotiated Education Plan that will support efficient and effective transfer of information about students
 - funding arrangements under local school management
 - networking between district disability services, central office, schools and other agencies
 - a reform and review of transport for students with disabilities
 - ongoing research into the issue, including contributions to national studies into the impact of transience on student learning.

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds

Learners bring with them a variety of cultural and linguistic experiences, values and attitudes that they have developed within the context of their home environment. Any planning for students with disabilities who are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds will require a knowledge and understanding of the needs of the learner and the support that may be required for the family. This could include religious, spiritual or family support from the family support worker or community liaison officer. Interpreting and translating may also be required.

The needs of children and students with disabilities from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may be more complex and difficult to assess due to language barriers.

English as a Second Language Program

The English as a Second Language (ESL) Program is an integral part of the management and delivery of multicultural education within the Department of Education, Training and Employment. The program is for learners of ESL who require English language support. It aims to maximise their participation in all areas of the curriculum as well as their learning outcomes by building on their knowledge, skills and understandings while they are acquiring English language competency.

Students access support through two related strands of the program, the ESL New Arrivals Program which provides intensive English instruction to students newly arrived in Australia and the General Support Program which provides English language support to ESL learners within mainstream schools.

ESL Guidance Officer

The ESL Guidance Officer (educational psychologist) provides an educational psychological service to school communities with respect to ESL learners and in partnership with schools and student services:

- works to assist them to cater more effectively for the academic, social, and emotional needs of their ESL students
- helps to accomplish the Essential Learnings and the concept of equity as described in the new curriculum framework (SACSA)
- provides a direct psychological service to New Arrival students and their teachers.

Services include psychological assessment of students with complex learning and/or emotional needs, as well as advice about appropriate programming and management to improve their learning outcomes.

The Guidance Officer (ESL) works to improve the effectiveness of the statewide guidance service to ESL students and their teachers by providing:

- a consultative service to other Guidance Officers, working collaboratively with them in relation to particular students
- training and development for them.

Other specialist school sector support services provided by DETE include Bilingual School Services Officers (BSSO's), Community Liaison Officers (CLO's) who liaise between children's services, school, student, community and parent bodies, and an Interpreting and Translating Service to preschools, schools and parents which can be used for Negotiated Education Planning purposes for students and children with disability and/or developmental delay.

Preschool Bilingual Program

The Preschool Bilingual Program (PBP) supports preschool services to provide for the access and participation of children and families from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds through the employment of Bilingual Assistants (BLA's). The program services children, parents and preschool centres in more than forty-five languages.

Aboriginal Students with Disabilities

Statistics from DETE District Support Services indicate an over representation of Aboriginal students in the numbers of students identified as students with disabilities. An outcome of the DETE plan for Aboriginal Education in early childhood and schooling 1999-2003 is that Aboriginal children and students with disabilities access appropriate services and support at a level comparable with their non-Aboriginal peers.

There have been long standing concerns about the lack of Aboriginal cultural inclusivity in assessment resources and the relevance of assessment techniques and processes to meet the needs of Aboriginal children and students. In 1999-2000, a Speech Pathology project produced resources for

assessments with an Aboriginal perspective. Anecdotal comments indicate that they have been well received by speech pathologists working with Aboriginal students.

In South Australia, the majority of Aboriginal students identified with disabilities are identified in relation to the criteria "language and communication". There is a need for development of assessment strategies that relate to the home language of Aboriginal children and students.

Aboriginal Education advocates for teaching and learning programs, which recognise the home language of Aboriginal children and students. This includes the incorporation of Aboriginal English into assessment programs for Aboriginal children and students with disabilities.

Relationships between service providers and Aboriginal parents/caregivers and the community are a significant contributor to addressing the particular needs of Aboriginal children and students. These relationships are often under pressure due to mobility of staff and families in rural and remote areas. One specific initiative to develop these relationships is the Anangu Education Special Services Team.

Anangu Education Special Services Team

The Anangu Education Special Services Team is a multidisciplinary team with expertise in hearing impairment, guidance (educational psychology) and speech pathology.

The program was established in 2000 to support schools and teachers working with students who are educationally at risk in the Anangu Aboriginal School in the Far North of the state.

iv) THE EFFECTIVENESS AND AVAILABILITY OF EARLY INTERVENTION PROGRAMS

The Department of Education Training and Employment provides a number of programs to support the early learning of young children with additional needs and/or developmental delay and at risk of future learning difficulties (**Appendix 13**).

In 2000-2001, 93.5% of four year old children in South Australia attended preschool. This universal preschool entitlement enables early childhood educators to identify children with potential learning difficulties and disabilities in the year before school thus delivering a preventative and early intervention service through the regular preschool program.

First Start

First Start is a home-based literacy program to help parents of very young children to support their children's language and literacy development. The program operates in Port Pirie and parts of the Adelaide metropolitan area. To be eligible for First Start, children must be under four years of age and experiencing some delay or difficulty in the development of language and literacy skills.

Fieldworkers visit families for approximately one hour a week and work directly with parents and children. They provide a 'hands on' program, based on play, talking, stories and everyday activities around the home.

Early Learning Resource Programs (Departmental Toy Libraries)

The Department of Education, Training and Employment provides early intervention support through mobile toy libraries which serve remote, Aboriginal or under-resourced communities. Formerly known as a toy library program, this service provides materials, toys, experiences and advice to help parents assist children with special learning needs.

Where possible, Early Learning Resource Program fieldworkers work with other early learning programs such as First Start and Playgroups to provide extra support for families with children who require extra assistance. This service is available only on a referral basis.

Preschool

Preschool services are funded and provided by the Department of Education, Training and Employment for children in the year before they commence school. Younger children may be able to attend if they live in rural areas, are Aboriginal or have special developmental needs. Most preschools offer a "pre-entry" program, which means that a child may attend the preschool for one session per week for up to ten weeks before starting the full preschool program.

Preschool Support Program

The Preschool Support Program provides extra staff to preschools to support the teaching and learning of children with additional needs. Through the Preschool Support Program, children with disabilities and/or developmental delay can attend their local preschool (**Appendix 14**).

Preschool support workers may:

- work directly with a child in the general play environment
- plan small activity groups to teach specific skills
- release other preschool staff to work with a child with a disability or developmental delay

Children are eligible for preschool support where they have one or more of the following:

- a disability (eg. autism, Down Syndrome)
- development that is at least 12 months behind that of other children of the same age, in one or more areas (eg. speech, physical development)
- significant behavioural issues
- severe speech and/or language impairment in their first language (as diagnosed by a speech pathologist).

Preschool Speech and Language Programs

Speech and Language Programs provide a high level of specialised support for children with severe specific speech and/or language impairments. The programs aim to strengthen children's communication by improving their talking and listening skills, ability to learn and interact with others. Speech and Language Programs are available in selected preschools across the metropolitan area (**Appendix 15**).

The Speech and Language Programs provide specialised teaching, which supports children's participation and learning at preschool. Speech and Language Programs include:

- individual and small group activities to teach talking and listening skills
- direct teaching through play
- follow up to support their use of new skills across all areas of learning.

Families are encouraged to work together with preschool staff to achieve the same goals as most of children's talking and listening occurs at home with family and friends. Everyday activities to help children improve their talking and listening skills are developed in consultation with parents/caregivers to enable them to work with their child at home.

Early Intervention Networks

The Department of Education, Training and Employment provides funding for a collaborative program, Early Intervention Networks, within the Department of Human Services. These networks contribute to the coordination of services for children and students with additional needs across a range of agencies. Early Intervention Network Coordinators are auspiced by Child and Youth Health, the Intellectual Disability Services Council and the Department of Education, Training and Employment. Service outcomes include:

- information about a range of general and specialist intervention services for children aged 0 to 6 years is available to families
- coordination of early intervention services
- families are supported in referral and utilisation of services

Early Intervention Service – Hearing Impaired

This service (previously known as Parent Guidance) provides visiting teacher services to support deaf and hearing impaired children from diagnosis (birth) until admission to school. These children may also have other disabilities.

Counselling, advice and relevant information is provided to parents/caregivers and families of deaf and hearing impaired children who live in the greater metropolitan area. Training and development, support and advice are provided to staff at preschools and child care centres where a child with hearing impairment is enrolled.

v) ACCESS TO AND ADEQUACY OF FUNDING AND SUPPORT IN BOTH THE PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTORS

Funding to support children and students with disabilities and additional needs is provided by both the State and Commonwealth governments.

The *Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities* provides policy advice to the Minister for Education and Children's Services in South Australia on the allocation of Commonwealth and State special education funding to eligible non-government organisations involved with the education of children and students with disabilities.

Policy advice relates to the education of children and students with disabilities from birth to twenty-one years of age. These children and students may be attending early intervention programs; government, independent or Catholic preschools and schools; or vocational education and training programs.

Funding increases from both the State and Commonwealth governments over the last decade have not been sufficient to keep pace with the increasing number of children and students eligible for support.

Preschool Support Program

The Preschool Support Program, providing additional resourcing to support the inclusion of children with additional needs in mainstream preschool programs is an indicator of the increasing demand for services. Funding is provided for the program through annual recurrent State Government allocations and Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities allocations including some Commonwealth funding.

Increasing demand

The demand for the Preschool Support Program has increased significantly over the past decade. Currently 5.9% of total preschool enrolments receive preschool support program funding. The number of children receiving support through the program has doubled in recent years. The number of children supported in 1995 and 2001 were 580 and 1,080 children respectively.

Also evident has been a marked increase in the number of children requiring full-time support due to disabilities (notably autism spectrum disorder) and/or complex and invasive health support needs. These children often require teacher as opposed to ancillary support, the latter being used where possible to maximise the use of Preschool Support Program resources.

The growth in demand for fulltime support for children with very high support needs has decreased the department's capacity to provide additional targeted support to children with mild to moderate developmental delays. These children are part of the group considered to be at risk for development of learning difficulties and often come to the attention of departmental support staff several years after beginning school as the learning difficulties resulting from moderate impairments compound.

Support for children with significant challenging behaviours has come to attention as an emerging area of need. Where targeted support for these children was a rare occurrence in the mid-1990s, an estimated ten preschools per term require a high level of additional staffing to implement individual behaviour programs for identified children whose behaviour cannot be managed effectively within preschool resources.

For example, in 2000 the Autism Association of South Australia withdrew its teacher support for children with Autism Spectrum Disorder enrolled in preschools. The department subsequently funded an additional 80 hours of teacher time per term at an additional cost of approximately \$10,000 per annum. The loss of this expertise also impacted on the capacity of preschools to meet the needs of these children.

Another example is the withdrawal of the Crippled Children's Association from the funding and operation of the speech and language programs. Although additional funding was secured from the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities, the relative cost borne by the department has continued to grow as funding to the Committee is not indexed for salary increases and covers only the consumer price index.

Similarly, the funding allocation for children with very high support needs has been eroded due to the increasing demand for support. Increases in both recurrent State and Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities funding have not accommodated the significant growth in demand for support.

The cost pressures on this and other programs will continue as the number of children and students requiring intensive behavioural support, health support and support due to disability/significant developmental delay increase.

Table 5: Number of children receiving Preschool Support Program funding, by year

	Number of children receiving support in term 3 of each year	Increase in number of children receiving funding over previous year (%)
1997	662	
1998	685	3.5%
1999	966 *	41%
2000	984	1.9%
2001	1080	9.7%

** the increase in children receiving support from 1998-1999 is due to the increased clustering of children within centres with one preschool support worker.*

Table 6: Recurrent State Preschool Support Program funding (1995-2001)

	State Funding (\$)	Average funding per child (\$)	Variation in average funding per child from previous year
1997	750,846	1,220	
1998	816,773	1,280	4.9%
1999	883,650	914	-29%
2000	1,034,875	1,051	15%
2001	1,093,025	1,012	-3.8%

Both State recurrent and funding through the Ministerial Advisory Committee have been divided by the total number of children receiving preschool support in the term 3 audit conducted each year.

Table 7: Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities * Preschool Support Program funding (1997-2001)

	Commonwealth Funding (\$)	Average funding per child (\$)	Variation in average funding per child from previous year
1997	506,559	824	
1998	517,950	811	-1.5%
1999	547,950	567	- 30%
2000	671,350	682	20%
2001	785,906	727	6.5%
2002	867,094 (1.5% increase)	Data not yet collected	

Increasing pressures on State funds to support children with additional needs has also come from the withdrawal of non-government organisations funding support to collaborative programs such as the preschool speech and language programs.

Access Assistants Program

Children and students who require complex and invasive health support at school or preschool receive support through the Child and Youth Health Access Assistants Program that is funded through the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities. This program is available to children and students in government and non-government schools and preschools on a needs basis.

The number of children and students requiring this assistance, and the complexity of their support needs, is increasing due to successful medical interventions. For example, in 1993 there were ten children in school and preschool with gastrostomies. In 2000 there were 83, and data from the Women's and Children's Hospital indicates that by the end of 2002 there will be 230 children requiring support with gastrostomies in schools and preschools in South Australia. There has also been an invisible and growing cost in the provision of support to students with personal care needs (for example toileting, oral eating and drinking, transfers and positioning).

Non-government schools

The State also provides funding for special needs students enrolled in non-government schools. The Annual Report of the Advisory Committee on Non-Government Schools in SA 2001 states that this group of students comprises those "*included in a special program to address their needs, where such a program has been agreed to and is financially supported by the school*". The Annual Report notes an increase of 3.7% in the number of FTE students (4,643) provided with special needs funding in 2001, over those funded in 2000 (4,475).

DETE school funding for students with disabilities

South Australia has developed a model of local school management (Partnerships 21), which increases the flexibility and authority of participating sites to decide for themselves how their resources can best be spent to improve learning outcomes.

Students with disabilities in non-Partnerships 21 sites receive funding via current teacher pupil ratios in special schools, units and special classes. For students with disabilities in mainstream schools, funding is provided through the A, D, I allocation based on a finite salary budget per year.

State funding for students with disabilities in locally managed sites is allocated through the global budget as:

- per school funding
- year level per capita funding
- additional allocations for students with disabilities and students with disabilities/severe challenging behaviours.

Appendix 16, the 2002 Global Budget, identifies all major components of state funding for students with disabilities.

This funding has steadily increased over the last few years to cope with the demand of increased numbers of students with complex needs.

Support Services

Resources provided by the State Government to the Ministerial Advisory Committee: Students with Disabilities also provides funding (State Special Education Recurrent Grants) to a number of non-government organisations to provide support to children and students with disabilities in government and non-government schools. These include:

- Autism Association Early Intervention and School Support
- Crippled Children's Association Early Intervention and School Support
- Down Syndrome Early Intervention and School Support
- Cora Barclay Centre Early Intervention and School Support (DETE is providing additional and temporary financial support 2001-2003)
- Townsend House Early Intervention and School Support
- Guide Dogs Association
- Child and Youth Health Access Assistant Program
- Joint Sector Intensive and Crisis Support.

DETE Support Services

District Support Services field staff have responsibility for delivery of services from district office sites to students and children with disabilities and learning difficulties in schools and early childhood centres (**Appendix 17**).

The following services for students with disabilities and students with learning difficulties are delivered or administered from district office sites:

- Early Childhood Support Services
- Disability Services
- Hearing Impairment Services
- Guidance Services
- Speech Pathology Services
- Behaviour Management Services
- Learning centres
- Interagency Referral Services.

Learning difficulties

The Department of Education, Training and Employment has a range of support options for students with learning difficulties as their needs vary considerably.

Directors and principals of centres and schools are responsible for managing the types of teaching and learning programs, deployment of staff, identification of students requiring support and the monitoring and review of programs.

The following options are available:

- the Negotiated Curriculum Plan (NCP), if students are verified through the Students with Disabilities Policy with a co-existing condition such as sensory impairment, intellectual impairment or language and communication difficulties
- a Learning Management Plan developed through joint planning with parents, caregivers, school personnel and, where deemed appropriate, the student
- school intervention programs, established with grants from the Early Assistance Grants, Basic Skills Test Funding, Flexible Initiatives Resourcing and Additional Special Education Funding or from global budget if the school is a Partnerships 21 school
- the Vacation Literacy and Numeracy Courses which support Years 6, 7, 8 and 9 students in their transition from primary to secondary settings
- DETE, in partnership with Flinders University, has sponsored a course titled the Graduate Certificate in Disability Studies Learning Difficulties. The purpose of this course is to raise awareness and skills so participants (teachers and school services officers) can more effectively cater for students with learning difficulties
- the Learning Assistance Program (LAP) with its focus on self esteem/confidence growth through support in the learning areas.

Vocational Education and Training Sector

Although the TAFE system in South Australia has the infrastructure and some funds allocated to providing additional supports to assist people with a disability to successfully participate in VET, many non-TAFE Registered Training Organisations do not have that infrastructure.

Currently, the Department of Education, Training and Employment is conducting a research project to cost the support that people with particular disabilities who are undertaking VET programs require. This research will then be used to inform policy regarding purchasing arrangements with TAFE Institutes. However, Commonwealth funded programs such as User Choice and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) Infrastructure Program need to include funding arrangements for supporting people with a disability in the guidelines.

Research by the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) indicates that the students with a disability undertaking an apprenticeship or a traineeship achieve more positive post-course employment outcomes than students with a disability not engaged in a contract of training.

However, people with a disability are not participating in these programs as readily as other Australians, accounting for only approximately 2% of people undertaking New Apprenticeships.

While there are a number of reasons for this low figure, a major disincentive is the constraints associated with the Commonwealth Disability Award Wage System. Employers are deterred from accessing this funding because of the bureaucratic administration processes.

vii) THE NATURE, EXTENT AND FUNDING OF PROGRAMS THAT PROVIDE FOR FULL OR PARTIAL LEARNING OPPORTUNITIES WITH MAINSTREAM STUDENTS

A goal of the department's Equity Statement (**Appendix 18**) is that "Learners are provided with the support they need to successfully access and participate in order to fulfil their potential".

The UNESCO Salamanca Statement recommends the inclusive education of students with disabilities in mainstream settings. The department's commitment to the creation of inclusive education communities is reflected in the large percentage of students with disabilities receiving their education in mainstream settings in departmental sites.

The Students with Disabilities Policy (1991) "acknowledges that the neighbourhood school is the first point of contact for the initial enrolment of all students. Upon enrolment, a child with a disability becomes a student. This enables the principal, parents, teachers and service providers to begin negotiations to determine an appropriate curriculum and support services and to identify a suitable placement for attendance"

Placement options

The department has a range of school placement options that cater for the wide range of learning needs of students with special needs and provide choice for parents/caregivers when choosing the most suitable education setting for their child.

A child may attend the regular classroom, a special class, or a special school or unit. Some children attend a combination of these settings.

- In 2000, 92.1% of all students with a disability attended a local school site either in a regular year level class, a special class or a unit, while 7.9% attended a Special school.

- Some 80% of students with disabilities are in primary and secondary mainstream classes and may be supported by services from the district offices or the Statewide Specialists Programs.
- 8.4% of students with disabilities attend a special class in either a primary or a secondary school and are able to access the support services from the district offices or the Statewide Specialists Programs. There are also Speech and Language classes in selected primary schools.
- 3.3% of students with disabilities attend special units (severe multiple disability, intellectual disability) or Centres for Hearing Impaired (oral and Auslan programs).
- 7.9% of students with disabilities attend special schools which include the statewide specialist programs of Townsend School for Vision Impaired Students, Kilparrin Teaching and Assessment Unit and Regency Park School.

Table 9: Percentage of Students with Disabilities in mainstream schools, special classes, special schools and units

Census Year	Students with Disabilities in Mainstream Schools						Special School	
	Mainstream Year Class		Mainstream Special Class		Mainstream Special Unit		No.	%
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
1993	5,210.3	75.6%	647.9	9.4%	163.2	2.4%	873.9	12.7%
1994	6,346.6	78.3%	727.8	9.0%	176.6	2.2%	857.5	10.6%
1995	7,438.9	81.4%	697.0	7.6%	176.0	1.9%	832.0	9.1%
1996	7,993.7	82.1%	776.1	8.0%	159.0	1.6%	809.9	8.3%
1997	8,159.4	81.5%	743.2	7.4%	293.0	2.9%	811.9	8.1%
1998	8,220.6	81.9%	800.7	8.0%	299.7	3.0%	719.2	7.2%
1999	8,350.2	80.6%	847.6	8.2%	325.2	3.1%	833.7	8.0%
2000	8,729.9	80.4%	916.6	8.4%	362.3	3.3%	855.4	7.9%

Data Sources: SA Government Schools Mid Year Enrolment Census 1993-2000
<http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au> <http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au>

Curriculum

All students with disabilities are explicitly included within the scope of the South Australian Curriculum, Standards and Accountability Framework (<http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au>), which states that students with disabilities will be provided with "curricula and pedagogies which enable them to connect with learning and demonstrate their achievements in a variety of ways".

An appropriate curriculum and program for students with disabilities is based on specific educational needs rather than the description of disability.

The Negotiated Education Plan (NEP) (**Appendix 19**) enables students teachers, parents and other support staff to negotiate and document an appropriate curriculum for individual learners with disabilities which explicitly addresses their educational needs to enable them to access, participate and achieve. This is an electronic tool available on a CD Rom, which during development and trialling has been found to be applicable for the development of personalised education plans for all students.

Programs to support inclusion

Numerous programs and services are available in the Department of Education, Training and Employment to enable and support the inclusion of students with disabilities and additional needs in mainstream settings and leading to the transition for students with disabilities from the school to work environment (**Appendix 20**).

Vocational Education and Training

Given that New Apprenticeships are an excellent entry into VET and provide on going employment opportunities for people with a disability, it is important to identify and address constraints.

In South Australia, a project is being undertaken to instigate changes to:

- Industrial Awards to allow part time traineeships and apprenticeships which would be more appropriate to the needs of some people with a disability.
- current VET funding programs (eg User Choice) to incorporate part-time completion of New Apprenticeship qualifications.
- National Training Packages to remove restrictions around part completion of qualifications. For example, the Horticulture Industry Training Package requires that core competencies be completed to obtain qualifications. However, it may be difficult for people with particular disabilities to complete the first aid core competencies required for AQF level 1-2, but they would have the ability to be very productive in positions requiring either of those qualifications in the horticulture industry.

Another issue for people with a disability undertaking mainstream VET is the lack of financial support to undertake VET. Mainstream VET programs which offer accredited training attract fees. Many people with a disability are unemployed, yet wish to undertake training to improve their employment opportunities. The cost associated with VET fees can be prohibitive for people with a disability and there is no financial support for costs incurred in participating in VET.

Research undertaken by the NCVER indicates that:

‘.....for students with disabilities to succeed in training and education, it must be recognised that they have complex needs ... diverse services such as transport, housing, personal care and support must all be considered if students with disabilities are to succeed in education and training.’

Buys, Kendall and Ramsden (1999) Vocational Education and Training for People with a Disability, Review of Research, NCVER.

Transport to and from work placements is a major issue for many people with a disability, particularly in rural and remote areas.

Currently the ANTA Australian Disability Training Advisory Council (ADTAC) is researching a “Whole of Life, All of Life Approach to Disability Reform” which aims to address some of these issues. (See attachment for further details)

vii) TEACHER TRAINING AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Department of Education, Training and Employment provides a range of training and development opportunities for teachers, school services officers (SSOs) and early childhood workers (ECW's) who are involved in the education of students with disabilities. In 1997 the department developed a brochure for all DETE staff entitled “*What do you need to know about disability discrimination?*” (**Appendix 21**). This has been part of the ongoing commitment by the department to educating staff about their obligations and responsibilities under the Disability Discrimination Act (1992).

All major initiatives of the department are implemented through training and development programs which focus on the inclusive aspects and opportunities within the program particularly in the area of action research such as the new curriculum framework (SACSA), Learning to Learn and the Discovery Schools initiatives.

Guidelines have been developed to support Preschool teams in delivering quality preschool programs for children with disabilities and/or developmental delay. These are called ‘*Including children with disabilities and/or developmental delay in preschools. Guidelines for successful practice*’ (1999) (**Appendix 22**).

The professional development of DETE staff in the field of disabilities and learning difficulties is an important issue as it ensures that staff are confident and competent as they provide quality teaching and learning programs and enables educators to comply with Commonwealth disability legislation.

Professional development is available from a number of sources and includes:

- Statewide – advertised in the Training and Development Directory, Xpress (departmental newspaper) or negotiated with individual teams and units within Student and Professional Services
- Regional/district – advertised or negotiated with district support services
- Cluster/single site – negotiated with individual providers.

Topics cover areas as diverse as:

- information on individual disabilities
- curriculum methodology, planning and assessment
- explicit teaching methodologies
- legal issues and legislation
- creating inclusive environments.

The following examples provide a snapshot of options.

Learning Difficulties Support Team

The Learning Difficulties Support Team provides training and development and advice to groups of parents, Learning Assistance Program volunteers, School Services Officers (teacher aides), individual and groups of teachers.

The team provides a responsive service, Preschool to Year 12, in country and metropolitan locations. Training and development topics focus on areas such as the difference between learning difficulties and learning disabilities, inclusive methodology, catering for students experiencing difficulties in spelling, reading, written language, mathematics and numeracy.

Training and development is provided to personnel working in the Vacation Literacy and Numeracy Program prior to each holiday program, thus extending the network of educators with expertise in the area of learning difficulties.

***“Fair and Reasonable”* Disability Discrimination Act Implementation Kit**

The Disability Discrimination Act Implementation Kit, “Fair and Reasonable” has been developed to support site leaders to comply with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act and to plan effectively for the care and education of all children and students.

It is a self-paced learning program that will assist staff in leadership positions to manage whole school change, improve service provision and to continue to develop collaborative relationships with the school community. It encourages them to look critically at the current policies and practices of their site and if necessary, to develop new frameworks and structures for promoting equitable outcomes for all children and students (**Appendix 23**).

Special Education Resource Unit

The Special Education Resource Unit (SERU) provides resource information and training and development to parents and teachers of children and students with disabilities and learning difficulties across the curriculum.

District and Statewide Services

District and Statewide services provide customised training and development to preschools and schools to support immediate needs and/or whole school change.

Partnerships with higher education sectors

Accreditation for many of the training and development programs has been achieved through the TAFE sector or the universities. For instance a partnership has been forged with Flinders University of SA (FUSA). Professional development needs have been identified and then courses have been developed and delivered by DETE and FUSA. Most courses have been at a post graduate level with two courses at masters level.

The courses presented to date include:

- Autism
- Positive Behaviour Support
- Down Syndrome
- Learning Difficulties
- Argumentative Communication
- Orientation and Mobility
- International Education (Special Education).

South Australian universities who offer pre-service teacher training have developed courses, which are inclusive of disability issues. Department staff contribute as lecturers for specific topics. However, there is no mandated course in students with disabilities, as such, that is required for graduation purposes. Because of the community's expectations, there is a need for all teacher training institutions in Australia to provide training in specific teaching methodologies for students with widely varying learning needs within the classroom setting.

viii) THE LEGAL IMPLICATIONS AND RESOURCE DEMANDS OF CURRENT COMMONWEALTH AND STATE AND TERRITORY LEGISLATION

As the overriding legislation in the area of disability discrimination with which the department must demonstrate compliance, the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) has had significant implications for the education of children/students with disabilities. All departmental policies related to this endeavour are under review in order to ensure compliance with the Act. Furthermore, the wide definition of disability within the Act has led to the review of a range of programs to ensure that practices are non discriminatory.

A major professional development resource was developed in 2000 to assist in implementing the Act, the *“Fair and Reasonable: Disability Discrimination Act Implementation Kit”*.

In South Australia, the Disability Discrimination Act has been viewed as educative and as a powerful agent of change. The Act was designed to socialise a community towards inclusion, stop discrimination and to reflect current values and priorities that encourage best practice for all.

Educators and administrators in SA have worked to ensure that our education community and the wider community has a common understanding of what this legislation means by:

- linking its intent with other legislation, for example, during the review of the Education Act, officers worked to ensure the Acts were congruent
- using it as the basis for disability policy development, for example, a review of disability services in DETE is underway to ensure policies are non discriminatory
- providing information about the Disability Discrimination Act, for example, specialist State wide services are being evaluated to ensure their suite of programs meet the draft Education Standards under the DDA
- developing resources/programs to empower staff to make decisions with confidence and competence so that they can comply with the Disability Discrimination Act, for example, mediation training for designated staff;
- developing planning strategies, for example, Negotiated Education Plans, that develop a logical approach to curriculum and service delivery at the system, local and individual level
- working with community groups, for example, proactive meetings with advocates and lobby groups
- analysing Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) reports, for example, findings that have found professional development of staff to be essential; *Finney vs Hills Grammar School* which found that students should be dealt with on a case by case basis.

Compliance with such significant legislation has caused an increase in demands for resources. The proposed introduction of the Education Standards in:

- enrolment
- participation
- curriculum development, accreditation and delivery
- student support services
- elimination of harassment

will result in an additional cost impact.

SA has analysed the cost impacts of this proposed subordinate legislation and predicts that cost pressures will be greatest in many areas including the:

- increasing number of identified eligible children and students due to the extension of the definition of disability in the Disability Discrimination Act beyond that in the current departmental policy. The cohort of students identified with a disability will now include children requiring health care

support, students with learning difficulties, who are currently explicitly excluded from the Commonwealth guidelines for funding in the Commonwealth Strategic Assistance for Improving Student Outcomes Program, and students with emotional and behaviour disorders.

- requirement of education providers to provide professional development in relation to the obligation of educators under the Education Standards. This will be a significant initial cost and a continuing cost as new teachers enter the State system. This issue will need to be addressed by preservice training as well as ongoing professional development for school communities.
- adaptation and production of curriculum support materials following the development of individual education plans for all students with a disability;
- provision of timely support services especially to isolated areas.
- additional costs for technology based services and laptop computers with specialised software programs that will be required for individual students.

b) *WHAT THE PROPER ROLE OF THE COMMONWEALTH AND STATES AND TERRITORIES SHOULD BE IN SUPPORTING THE EDUCATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES*

There are some significant roles for the Commonwealth to assist in improving the educational outcomes of children/students with disabilities.

Definition of students with disabilities

As stated earlier, there is no common agreement across Australian states and territories concerning policies and eligibility criteria for students with disabilities and learning difficulties. A starting point for this is the definition of a student with a disability.

Currently State and Territory policies regarding the education of children and students with disabilities vary in their definition of disability.

As the Disability Discrimination Act (1992) is the overriding Commonwealth legislation in this area, all states and territories are currently examining their policies and practices in relation to their compliance with this legislation.

The Commonwealth Government provides funding to the States and Territories through the Commonwealth Programs for Schools grants. The Commonwealth Strategic Assistance for Improving Students Outcomes (SAISO) program combines former literacy and special education funding and is available to government and non-government school education authorities in States and Territories.

The definition of disability used by the Commonwealth for the purposes of determining eligibility states:

“A child with a disability means a child who has been assessed by a person with relevant qualifications as having an intellectual, sensory, physical, social or emotional impairment or more than one of those impairments to a degree that:

- *if the child is of school age, satisfies the criteria for enrolment in special education programs or services provided by the government of the State in which the child resides*
- *if the child is below school age, would satisfy those criteria upon reaching that age.*

Children whose only impairments are specific learning difficulties or for whom remedial education or remedial support is appropriate are not eligible.” (p 99)

Commonwealth Programmes for Schools Quadrennial Administrative Guidelines 2001 to 2004

This definition is not congruent with the definition of disability within the Disability Discrimination Act, which all education providers must comply with. Commonwealth programs are included within the objects of the Act, which are.

- (a) to eliminate, as far as possible, discrimination against persons on the ground of disability in the areas of:
 - (i) work, accommodation, education, access to premises, clubs and sport
 - (ii) the provision of goods, facilities, services and land
 - (iii) existing laws
 - (iv) the administration of Commonwealth laws and programs
- (b) to ensure, as far as practicable, that persons with disabilities have the same rights to equality before the law as the rest of the community
- (c) to promote recognition and acceptance within the community of the principle that persons with disabilities have the same fundamental rights as the rest of the community.

As the Commonwealth has broadened the definition of disability within Commonwealth legislation, the amount of Commonwealth funding for students with disabilities should be increased to cover the broader cohort of students identified in the Disability Discrimination Act and the definition of disability for all Commonwealth programs should be inclusive of the definition within the Disability Discrimination Act.

Research of National Significance

The current Commonwealth models focussing on the use of academic and/or professional researchers recruited through a tender process to undertake research on topics of National Significance has limited potential to impact on the practice of educators across the states and territories. The resulting documents require implementation strategies and analysis by policy officers across the states and territories. This usually occurs on an 'ad hoc' basis without a national mechanism to support individual implementation and evaluation.

An alternative approach could be to use a collaborative action research approach across the states and territories. This would involve providing states and territories with funding to develop specific research projects to investigate issues of national significance through a collaborative forum.

This method would provide a number of tangible benefits including:

- development of networks and opportunities for professional sharing
- engagement of practitioners on the ground in devising, implementing and evaluating strategies and approaches
- a 'hands-on' inclusion of local practitioners in the investigation process.

Commonwealth funding to support research and intervention programs in the following areas would promote greater understanding of issues and solutions and the development of shared knowledge leading to more positive learning outcomes for students with disabilities and learning difficulties.

Aboriginal students with disabilities

To address the needs of Aboriginal students with disabilities particularly in remote and isolated situations the following issues must be addressed:

- assessment tools/and strategies in home languages
- culturally relevant intervention programs
- improved ways of communication and resolving issues with Aboriginal students and their communities
- monitoring of student achievement that caters for mobility of families
- extensive inservice for staff working with Aboriginal students with disabilities

Students with mental illness and other disorders

The DDA definition of disability which states "a disorder, illness or disease that effects a person's thought process, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or that results in disturbed behaviour" brings into targeted disability programs, students with mental illness and other disorders, which may or may not be recognised by other Commonwealth and/or state programs.

It is only recently that the enormity of mental health problems and associated disturbed and challenging behaviours have been quantified (WA data 16%-20% of young people). For example, secondary schools have reported an increase in the enrolment of students who will/may require additional support because they have learning difficulties/learning disabilities and/or disabilities as a result of prolonged drug usage.

These students who may be in receipt of Commonwealth Disability Benefits, and have additional carer support provided through Commonwealth Rehabilitation Programs are recommended by Centrelink to return to school as part of their rehabilitation program. They are however, not eligible for targeted funding through the Special Education School Support and Special Education School Support per capita component of the Commonwealth Strategic Assistance for Improving Students Outcomes (SAISO) program.

Secondary schools report an increase in the need for skilled staff and specific financial resources to support these students to participate and attain in the curriculum. This issue has been raised as an unplanned emerging need for funding.

Other areas requiring a coordinated national research approach include:

- projects that engage 'student voice' in curriculum planning and models of service delivery
- most promising practice for educational interventions from the early years to senior secondary years of schooling for a range of students with disabilities especially those with severe multiple disabilities
- the use of emerging distance technologies for service provision to increase the access to advice for staff, to provide on-line training and development, to provide accurate information to families and to provide an on-line capacity for intervention programs.

Early Intervention

The role of the Commonwealth in promoting the importance of Early Childhood Intervention through targeted funding to this area is vital.

- *Brain Research*

Numerous research studies are continuing to identify the long-term benefits of significant early years (0-8) intervention for all young children including those with disabilities and developmental delay. These include the Fraser Mustard Early Years Study, *Reversing the Real Brain* (1999) from Canada, which concludes that "...the early years from conception to age six have the most important influence of any time in the life cycle on brain development and subsequent learning, behaviour and health"

- *Antisocial behaviour*

The recently published *Sex Differences in Antisocial Behaviour*, by Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter and Silva (2002) identify neuro-biological risk factors in young males engaged in crime. These risk factors include difficult temperament before age three, poor early language skills, poor memory, attention deficit, hyperactivity, slow heart rate and impulsive self-control problems. Later in life, as young men, they are likely to spend time in prison, unemployed and with drug and alcohol addictions all of which impose a considerable cost on society that may be alleviated through successful early intervention programs.

A paper recently published in the British Medical Journal by Scott, Knapp, Henderson and Maughan (2001) *Financial cost of exclusion: follow up study of antisocial children* concludes that childhood anti-social behaviour is a major predictor of how much an individual will cost society. Prevention and early intervention in relation to such anti-social behaviour may be more cost-effective than the large sums spent by numerous agencies on the results of anti-social behaviour in adults.

- *Parenting groups*

In a second study, *Multicentre controlled trial of parenting groups for childhood anti-social behaviour in clinical practice*; Scott, Spender, Doolan, Jacobs and Aspland (2001) demonstrated that parenting groups effectively reduce antisocial behaviour in children in real life conditions.

With the definition of disability within the Disability Discrimination Act including “a disorder, illness or disease that effects a person’s thought process, perception of reality, emotions or judgement or that results in disturbed behaviour” children suffering from conduct disorders leading to antisocial behaviours are now within the definition of disability as described above. The requirements of education providers to address the needs of these students and the increasing numbers of students presenting with such disorders is creating huge stresses on the current budgets allocated for students with disabilities. The fact that these children do not meet the criteria for funding under Commonwealth targeted programs must be addressed.

The Blair Government in the UK has made the early years a clear priority with *Sure Start*. This program aims to raise the physical, social, emotional and intellectual status of young children through improved services. These programs are targeted in areas of highest need and the specific services offered are based on the local needs, but core services are:

- outreach services and home visiting
- support for families and parents
- good quality play, learning and child care
- primary and community health care and advice on child health and development
- support for those with special needs.

Australia also requires this coordinated approach across the states to address the increasing need for early intervention and prevention programs.

Professional Development

The facilitation by the Commonwealth of the provision of accredited training and development for teachers and ancillary staff in inclusive teaching methodologies will support a consistent national approach. This would lead to benchmarking opportunities to develop a culture of best practice in the inclusion of students with disabilities across the states.

Commonwealth support and encouragement for preservice university courses that attend to inclusivity and specific disability studies will ensure that there will always be specialist support for generalist teachers and for the implementation of the Standards in Education under the DDA.

Remote/isolated service provision

All states have issues regarding the provision of services to children and students with disabilities in remote and isolated areas. Collaborative study projects to develop innovative approaches to this issue through the use of Information Technology and other methods would be very cost-effective, as individual states would not be required to 'reinvent the wheel' and 'muddle through' such important policy making decisions.

Socio-economic disadvantage and disability

In January 2001 the Social Policy Research Centre of the University of New South Wales prepared a report, *Socio-Economic Disadvantage and the Prevalence of Disability* for the Victorian Department of Human Services. The report's finding of a relationship between socio-economic disadvantage (as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics Index of Relative Socio-Economic Disadvantage – IRSED) and the prevalence of disability may have potential implications for State and Commonwealth provision of disability services. Further analysis of such provision needs to be undertaken at a national and state level to verify the relationship between the prevalence of disability and socio-economic status and to determine possible implications for disability service provision.

Vocational Education and Training

As mentioned previously, a discussion paper developed by the ANTA Australian Disability Training Advisory Council (ADTAC) titled '*Whole of Life, All of Life Approach to Disability Reform*' identifies the importance of early intervention as a strategy for successfully addressing the needs of people with a disability. It notes that if there is a failure or lack of support structures in one phase, this can cause a crisis for a person with a disability and affect their ability to participate in future life experiences.

The extensive mapping of the programs and policies in the VET, employment and disability sectors at a State, Territory and Commonwealth level funded by ANTA recently and undertaken by ADTAC made it apparent that changes to systems in one life domain cannot be effective unless supported by changes to systems in other areas of life.

As a result, to achieve positive outcomes for students with disabilities the provision of services should be client focussed. This requires greater collaboration and building of partnerships across all levels of government. With respect to the VET sector, the Blueprint which underpins ANTA's five year national strategy for increasing opportunities for people with a disability in VET '*Bridging Pathways*', contains a number of actions that require effective partnerships between government agencies at State, Commonwealth and local levels. Some of these actions will not be cost-neutral while others can be addressed through building more effective partnership and collaborative arrangements.

ADTAC's discussion paper recognises that there are some key groups who have a particular role as partners. These include government agencies and advisory bodies with responsibility for VET, disability, school, employment, transport, housing, rural issues and health, those areas of industry with responsibility for providing employment, creating infrastructure and providing technology solutions, people with a disability, and disability sector organisations.

To extend the provision of services beyond the VET sector ANTA and ADTAC will take a leadership role in facilitating implementation of these actions at a national level.

Appendices

1. Students with Disabilities: Policy Statement – July 1991
2. Collaborative Action Plan - 1992
3. Services for Children with Special Needs – 1987
4. Early Childhood disability category descriptors
5. Schooling disability category descriptors
6. Support levels-Preschool
7. Support levels-School
8. DDA definition of disability
9. Health and Challenging Behaviour Support information
10. Education Profile Questionnaire – 2002
11. Student Education Profile Areas of Support
12. Transience and students with disabilities: conversations with the field – July 2001
13. Early Years Support For Families and Children
14. Preschool Support Program
15. Preschool Speech and Language Programs
16. The 2002 Global Budget
17. DETE Support Services
18. Equity Statement – 2001
19. Negotiated Education Plan (CD Rom cover) – 2002
20. Inclusive Programs
21. What do you need to know about disability discrimination? – 1999
22. Fair and Reasonable DDA Implementation kit – 2000
23. Including children with disabilities and/or developmental delay in preschools - 1999