

**Submission
No 110**

INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS

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Subject:

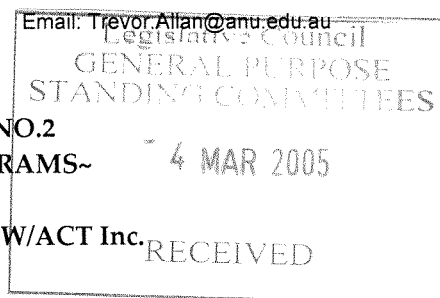
Summary



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**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL GENERAL PURPOSE STANDING COMMITTEE NO.2
~INQUIRY INTO POST SCHOOL DISABILITY PROGRAMS~**

Response from the Disability Education Association NSW/ACT Inc.

Introduction

The Disability Education Association of NSW/ACT (DEAN) is a professional association of practitioners in the Disability services of universities and TAFE Institutes in NSW and the ACT.

DEAN has been established to act as a peak body to represent the interests of staff and students in the sector, provide professional development activities and to facilitate the maintenance and enhancement of access to Post-Secondary education for people with disabilities.

This submission focuses directly on item 4 of the terms of reference for the inquiry and contains information gathered collectively from members of DEAN and in consultation with students affected by changes to the ATLAS program. We thank the Committee for the opportunity to provide input.

Statement in response to the terms of reference of this inquiry.

4. The impact of the exclusion of students enrolled or proposing to enrol in post secondary and higher education from eligibility for assistance under the new programs.

- Students with high support needs disabilities require significant supports and assistance to attend and complete university studies. These supports can include adaptive technology and equipment to enable study at home, transport via taxi, wheelchair modifications and attendant care. These supports are costly and are in addition to the already high costs of daily living with a disability. Quite simply, without appropriate funding, students with high support needs disabilities will remain absent from university campuses.
- Although universities currently provide assistance with academic materials and supports this is limited to educational, on campus services and is not able to address all the needs of high support needs students. Changes to the post school disability programs means that there is no funding available for the additional supports required by high support needs students.
- In general, people with high support needs disabilities have experienced many barriers and discrimination in accessing education. Therefore it is of significant concern that students who were previously eligible to receive funding through ATLAS have been abruptly cut from the program or their funding reduced. Without funding for personal care, transport and other specific supports student's ability to complete tertiary studies is jeopardised. People with disabilities are already under represented in the university sector; removing supports such as ATLAS funding creates yet another barrier.

- The exclusion of higher education students from eligibility under the new programs is likely to be regarded as highly offensive and based on a patronising assumption that people with high support needs disabilities do not or cannot aspire to complete tertiary studies. Although current student numbers are small surely every student with high support needs disabilities who is capable and motivated to participate in tertiary education should be supported to take up the opportunity. The benefits afforded to the individual and the wider community are immense.
- University study provides personal benefits and rewards including increased self esteem, commitment and discipline, networking and social opportunities. For many students with high support needs disabilities tertiary studies is an essential step in working towards gaining future employment. Unable to be involved in physical work, these students are focussing on a future career where they can apply their intellectual and academic skills.
- There is currently no state or federal government program to assist students with disabilities who have additional high support needs to access university studies. Both levels of government need to seriously consider ways to support these students, to promote substantive equality for people with high support needs disabilities in tertiary education.

Specific examples

STUDENT 1 (CM)

Female student who has Cerebral Palsy.

CM has Cerebral Palsy and uses an electric wheelchair. She has significant difficulties with fine motor movements such as holding a pen or using a keyboard. CM has limited speech and is unable to transfer out of her wheelchair independently.

CM is studying a Bachelor of Community Welfare and has previously utilised ATLAS funding to obtain personal care and transport to university. Academically she is doing very well and it appears likely that she is capable of post graduate study. However under the new post school programs CM receives a reduced amount of funding and therefore reduced personal care support at university. All of the funding, which equates to 10 hours support per week, is used to provide personal care and transport during semester weeks.

As a result CM's time on campus is restricted, she cannot complete additional study or research in the library and she cannot attend social events or activities simply because there are no additional funds available for personal care. Outside of semester weeks CM is unable to participate in social, community or life activities because all available funds have been condensed into providing support to attend university.

STUDENT 2 (PM)

Male student with a physical disability

PM recently enrolled in university study. He has a significant physical disability and requires attendant care to enable him to be independent on campus. Last year at high school PM received personal assistance from a full time Teachers Aid. Due to the recent changes in the post school programs PM is not eligible for assistance as a university student. This creates a very difficult situation for PM who is uncertain if he will actually be able to attend university.

STUDENT 3 (BM)

Male student who is blind

BM recently completed a degree in music and languages because he was able to utilise funds through the ATLAS program to support his attendance at university. For BM studying music and languages was extra challenging. He required additional personal tutorial support and assistance to cover all of the course material and keep pace with the class. Without the support of ATLAS funding BM would not have been able to acquire the specific individual supports he required to complete his course.

STUDENT 4 (MF)

Female student who has Cerebral Palsy

MF recently completed her degree in Law. ATLAS funds assisted MF to obtain some of the personal support and assistance she required to attend university. MF has Cerebral Palsy that severely affects her movement and speech. She uses an electric wheelchair and requires regular assistance from attendant carers for all of her personal care requirements. ATLAS funds were utilised to provide taxi transport to and from campus and to provide attendant care for personal support and to enable independent research and library study.

Conclusion

Access to ATLAS funds, under the former program, has enabled a small number of students with high support needs disabilities to attend and complete university studies. For these students ATLAS funding was used primarily to provide transport and essential personal care assistance on campus. This offered students the independence and flexibility required to complete a tertiary program.

Under the new post school disability programs students attending university will no longer be eligible for assistance. This creates yet *another* barrier to education for people with disabilities and is likely to mean that for students with high support needs the obstacles to accessing a university education are just too great. The recent program changes are effectively denying students with the greatest needs the opportunity and right to achieve a tertiary education.

The Disability Education Association of NSW/ACT encourages the government to reconsider the eligibility criteria for the new post school programs and to seek ways to reduce the barriers to education and employment for people with disabilities rather than increase them.

Submission prepared on behalf of the Disability Education Association NSW/ACT Inc by:

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