

Submission
No 370

**INQUIRY INTO THE PROVISION OF EDUCATION TO
STUDENTS WITH A DISABILITY OR SPECIAL NEEDS**

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**Submission to the
Inquiry into the provision of education
to students with a disability or special
needs**

On behalf of:



Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children

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1. Summary

In this submission, the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children (RIDBC) elaborates upon several issues that relate to two of the terms of reference for the inquiry, namely:

1. The nature, level, and adequacy of funding for the education of children with a disability
7. The provision of adequate teacher training, both in terms of pre-service and ongoing professional training.

In summary, these issues, and associated recommendations, are as follows:

Issue One: The inadequacy of funding support made available by government to provide effective early intervention services to children with disabilities (particularly sensory disabilities) in the years from birth to school age to enable maximum long term development.

Recommendation One: That the Inquiry report recommends the provision of adequate financial support to both government and non-government services to cater for the needs of newborn children and children of preschool age and, that those funds be distributed in a manner which ensures there are a range of options for communication available to children.

Issue Two: The inadequacy of funding support made available by the two tiers of government to allow students with disabilities (particularly sensory disabilities) to opt for education in a regular (mainstream) non-government school.

Recommendation Two: That the Inquiry Report makes recommendations concerning the assurance of adequate levels of government funding to provide support for the integration of students with disabilities, regardless of whether those students attend government or non-government schools.

Issue Three: The diminishing opportunities (or requirement) for teachers to undertake specialised professional preparation programs to work with children with sensory disabilities (hearing and/or vision impairment).

Recommendation Three: That the Inquiry Report makes recommendations concerning (a) the need to ensure a nexus between appropriate qualification and the deployment of teachers to work with the population of children with sensory disabilities in early intervention, preschool, and school environments; (b) the assurance of adequate levels of government funding to provide for the ongoing provision of highly specialised teacher training for teachers of children with sensory disabilities, and (c) the need for government to fund mechanisms for ensuring that teachers are encouraged to undertake such training (e.g., through funded scholarships or the availability of HECS-liaible or HECS-exempt places in postgraduate training programs).

Brief Background

The Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children is Australia's largest non-government provider of special education services for children with disabilities. It is also the oldest provider of educational services to children with disabilities in Australia, having continually provided such services since 1860.

RIDBC's primary purpose is to provide high quality educational services to children who have significant hearing and/or vision impairment, including children who have additional disabilities. To this end, it operates three independent special schools, five preschools, an extensive home-based and remotely delivered early-intervention program, extensive support services for children with sensory disabilities who are integrated into regular schools, and a wide range of ancillary and support services including an assessment unit and alternative format production facilities.

In affiliation with the University of Newcastle, RIDBC administers the Renwick Centre—a centre for research and professional development in the education of children with impaired hearing or vision. Having been in operation since 1993, RIDBC Renwick Centre has become the pre-eminent provider in Australasia of education for teachers of deaf and teachers of children who are blind or vision impaired and associated professionals (e.g., professionals in specialist areas such as auditory-verbal therapy or orientation and mobility training). Since 1994, more than 480 graduates have taken awards (qualifications) of the University of Newcastle for studies through RIDBC Renwick Centre.

3. Response to the Terms of Reference

This response is in two parts. Section 3.1 provides a broad response to the terms of reference by listing some important issues in the education of children with sensory disabilities. Section 3.2 addresses several specific issues in response to terms of reference 1 & 7.

3.1 Broad Response—Issues in the Education of Children with Sensory Disabilities

There is a wide range of issues that require effective response as a basis for ensuring that programs for students with (sensory) disabilities are adequate to meet their educational needs.

For the purposes of this submission, we have listed briefly some of the issues and principles that should be considered in developing and delivering education and education support services for children with sensory disabilities. RIDBC would welcome the opportunity to give evidence about these issues, and/or to address other issues relating to the education of children with sensory disabilities that may be raised with or by the General Purpose Standing Committee of the Legislative Council.

3.1.1 Issues in the Provision of Educational Services for Children who are Deaf or Hearing Impaired

The population of children who require specialist educational services because of their hearing impairment is extremely diverse. Children who are deaf and/or hearing impaired display a wide range of needs and preferences in regard to primary language and mode of communication.

A guiding principle of educational service provision is that there can be no assumption of a “one size fits all” approach to delivering effective services and optimal outcomes for children who are deaf or hearing impaired.

This diversity within the population of children who are deaf or hearing impaired and the need for comprehensive services to serve all members of such a diverse group raises, among others, the following issues:

Early Intervention and Early Childhood Education

- Early identification of hearing loss and early and intensive family centred intervention for children who are deaf or hearing impaired and their families has proven to be a critical component in achieving positive developmental and educational outcomes for this group.
- Increasingly, the availability of universal newborn hearing screening (and associated educational intervention services) has enabled more age-appropriate developmental outcomes for children who are deaf in New South Wales. Nevertheless, such availability is not a panacea for the many issues faced by children who are born with hearing loss and their families. The continuing availability of specialist educational support services remains a necessary component of effective service delivery for this group.
- Early educational services, as for all educational services for children who are deaf or hearing impaired, should include a range of possible options for families in regard to type and location of program (integrated, inclusive separate special preschool/school, etc) as well as methodological and communication approach. Diversity in the population will dictate a range of required program responses, albeit that some options (e.g., programs using alternative or augmentative communication) will be required by very small numbers of children and families.
- Parents should routinely receive accurate and unbiased information about their child’s development, the likely program requirements and the nature and availability of different program options, including the availability of different approaches to communication and language development. There should be continuing capacity for decisions to be reviewed and programs to be amended according to individual needs and requirements.

Communication and Language

- The development of age-appropriate and effective communication and language skills is fundamental to a deaf or hearing-impaired child’s

academic, social, cognitive, and linguistic development, as well as their mental and physical well being.

- Children who are deaf or hearing impaired should have their individual communication and language needs fully assessed as infants and throughout their educational experience as a basis for decision-making about appropriate interventions and support for their linguistic development.
- Early intervention and ongoing educational programs should provide for a range of intervention options according to the assessed needs and desires of each child and family.
- Teacher education and subsequent teacher employment processes should be structured to ensure that teachers have the required high level of proficiency in (a) the language and mode of communication that is required for their deployment in specialised educational environments for deaf students, and (b) the particular pedagogies associated with the effective development of language via that language and mode of communication.
- Children who are deaf or hearing impaired should, as part of their programmed educational experiences, have access to a sufficient number of age, developmental, and communication/language peers. Individual integration in the absence of communication/language peers *may* be counterproductive in terms of educational and social-emotional outcomes.
- Where interpreters are used as part of a response to the language and communication needs of students who are deaf, they should be certified in accordance with national standards for interpreters (i.e., NAATI).

Program Location and Service Options

It is important that decisions relating to placement/program type should be based on the unique communication, language, social, and developmental needs of individual students. Again, there can be no “one size fits all” approach to such issues. The unique linguistic and social issues associated with deafness *may* dictate that a special school or “congregated” program (i.e., where a “critical mass” of linguistic peers is integrated into a regular school program) is more appropriate than integrated placement.

The appropriateness of any type of placement—integrated or separate school—should be judged only in terms of the individual needs of particular children. Value should not be ascribed to one type of program on any basis other than individual children’s requirements. The aims of all placement options should be consistent and entirely uncontroversial—that is, for the child to achieve academic, personal, and social outcomes commensurate with their own potential, regardless of the language or communication mode that is being used.

- It is important that educational authorities (State and/or Federal) ensure that there is a comprehensive continuum of program options available for children who are deaf or hearing impaired (i.e., separate schools, “congregated” integrated settings, or fully inclusive environments).

- The availability of a comprehensive range of program options requires the assurance of normalised curriculum standards, appropriate financial allocations, and the oversight of delivery systems to ensure that all the necessary supports are available to make all of the options viable for children who are deaf or hearing impaired.
- Not all options need to be made available within all sectors of the education system (i.e. government and non-government). However, there is a need for government to accept responsibility for ensuring that the provisions that are in place are comprehensive and adequately resourced.
- Consideration *must* be given to how a comprehensive range of options can be made available/accessible to students and families who are geographically removed from major centres of population.
- The curriculum for students who are deaf and hearing-impaired, regardless of placement, should be fundamentally the same as that for students without disabilities but with such varied instructional approaches and supports as may be required.

Technology

Various forms of technology are relevant to the needs of children who are deaf or hearing impaired. When used appropriately, such technology can greatly enhance the learning capabilities of students with impaired hearing.

As new technologies are incorporated into general education, it is imperative that these be made completely accessible to children and adult learners who are deaf or hearing impaired. Federal and state laws such as the Disability Discrimination Act already govern these availabilities but may need to be enhanced to ensure such access.

- Children who will use their residual hearing should be fitted as early as possible with appropriate technology. To this end there is a need to ensure that there is no diminution of the Federal Government's commitment to the provision of free and universally available access to hearing services and hearing equipment under the terms of the Hearing Services Program. Extension of this program to devices other than hearing aids (particularly cochlear implants) should be a priority issue for governments—state and federal.
- Parents who may wish to pursue the option of cochlear implantation should be able to receive clear and unbiased information about this option in the context of their chosen programs for early intervention and/or early audiological management.
- All videos used in all school settings should be captioned (either open or closed) for those who are deaf or hearing impaired.
- All instructional software should be accessible to children who are deaf or hearing impaired (i.e., ensuring that there are visual analogues of all auditory information).

Personnel

- See specific comments and recommendations under 3.2.2.

3.1.2 Issues in the Provision of Educational Services for Children who are Blind or Vision Impaired:

The population of children who require specialist educational services because of their vision impairment is also extremely diverse. Children who are blind or vision impaired display a wide range of difficulties and varying adaptations to vision loss. For some children, blindness or vision impairment will be their only disability. However, for a large proportion, vision impairment will be only one of several identified disabilities (intellectual, physical, or emotional) that will affect their learning.

The challenge for educational services for children who are blind or vision impaired, including those with additional disabilities, is to teach skills that sighted children typically acquire through vision. Students who are blind or vision impaired will use a variety of methods to learn to read, write, and acquire academic and nonacademic skills. For reading, some students use Braille exclusively, while others will rely on large print or regular print with low vision aids. Some may rely on computer-generated speech, while others have sufficient functional vision to use regular print. This diversity must be recognised and catered for by any educational service-delivery system.

Specifically, this diversity and the need for comprehensive services for this group raise, among others, the following issues:

Early Intervention and Early Childhood Education

- Children and their families must be referred to an appropriate education program as soon as possible after diagnosis of a significant impairment of vision. Referral mechanisms and community awareness programs should ensure that this occurs.
- Family-centred early intervention for children who are blind or vision impaired and their families has proven to be an important component in the children's age-appropriate development.

Communication and Language

- Access to educational services, whether they be specialised or wholly integrated, must include an assurance that instructional materials will be available to students in the appropriate media (Braille, large print, electronic format, etc.) and at the same time as their sighted peers.
- There needs to be an assured supply of educational and recreational reading materials for students of all ages. To this end, appropriate funding and support for Braille and large print production agencies needs to be ensured.

Personnel

- It is critical to the success of educational programs for children who are blind or vision impaired that there be adequate provision of skilled and competent specialist staff across a range of categories: service managers,

visiting and consulting teachers, orientation and mobility instructors, and technical support personnel.

- It is also critical that there be a critical mass of personnel who have adequate training in the production of Braille across all necessary codes (e.g., literary, mathematical, music).
- See also specific comments and recommendations under 3.2.2.

Adaptive Technology

- Systems of funding adaptive aids and equipment for students who are blind or vision impaired that link the equipment to schools rather than students themselves are problematic for students who move between schools and, in particular, between service sectors. It is critical that consideration be given to a system of personalized funding for acquisition of at least some of the technological equipment that children who are blind or vision impaired require to access the curriculum. Effective use of technology by students can be achieved only if the necessary training is conducted. The current supply of teachers trained to instruct and support children who are blind/vision impaired is inadequate. Competent use of technology at the earliest possible age benefits not only the students but results in considerable savings to school education and tertiary education providers.

3.2 Specific Responses to Selected Terms of Reference

3.2.1 Adequacy of Support for Early intervention in the Non-Government Sector

The issue considered here addresses the first of the terms of reference and relates to the inadequacy of funding support made available by governments to provide effective early intervention services to children with disabilities (particularly sensory disabilities) in the years from birth to school age to enable their long term development.

Early Intervention services are currently conducted by a variety of government and non-government agencies. Overall funding is piecemeal and highly inadequate. Most non-government services rely heavily on charitable support to enable the provision of quality services.

The provision of targeted or tied funding (i.e., of the type currently made available to families on an individual basis) for children with Autism, would significantly decrease the dependency of service providers on charitable fundraising and would improve quality, availability and hence the accessibility of programs for families across the state.

Recommendation:

That the Inquiry report recommends the provision of adequate financial support to both government and non-government services to cater for the needs of newborn children and children of preschool age. Specifically, that

consideration be given to a funding model equivalent to that currently provided by the Federal Government in regard to early intervention service provision for children with Autism (i.e., funding at prescribed levels per child tied to the child and able to be applied with any approved and accredited service provider).

3.2.1 Adequacy of Support for Integrated Education in the Non-government Sector

The issue considered here also addresses the first of the terms of reference and relates to the inadequacy of funding support made available by the two tiers of government to allow students with disabilities (particularly sensory disabilities) to opt for integrated education in a non-government school.

The majority of children with sensory disabilities are educated in regular educational environments—typically with significant (often very high) levels of additional special educational support.

It is evident, however, that students with disabilities are not proportionally represented across the government and non-government sectors of the education system. Children with disabilities of all types are significantly under-represented in non-government schools (particularly in independent schools). In 2007, students with disabilities accounted for 5.7% of enrolments in government schools whereas, in non-government schools, the proportion was just 2.5%.

Recent federal governments have reinforced the commitment to the availability of parental choice between the government and non-government sectors for schooling. However, in spite of the legal and educational imperatives (including case law concerning disability discrimination), there remains a question about whether the choice of a non-government school is really a viable and supported option for all children with disabilities.

According to community standards, the cost of “choosing” a non-government school education is met in part by the parents of each student, and in part by the Australian tax-paying community. The contribution by Governments (State and Commonwealth) to the education of a student in a non-government school is, on average, approximately half of that contributed for each student in a government school.

It is clear that this financial commitment to giving parents a right of choice between schools and sectors does not apply equally well in the case of students with disabilities. Although there is a government commitment to choice, there is only a limited strategy for giving practical effect to that commitment where children with disabilities are concerned.

The Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (1992) obliges non-government schools to provide access and support. However, the Act places no obligation upon the Commonwealth to assist in meeting the cost of such provision. The cost of the special support required by a student with a

disability is expected to be borne largely by the school community. In the case of a child with a sensory disability, the cost of such support is many times greater than the cost of educating a child without disabilities.

There is an existing mechanism for funding both government and non-government schools in regard to the special educational needs of students with disabilities across both government and non-government schools (i.e., the *Literacy, Numeracy and Special Learning Needs—Schools Grants Programme*). The level of funding available under this program (in both its recurrent and capital components) falls considerably short of the amounts needed to support a student with significant disabilities—particularly a student with a sensory disability.

The per-capita grant available to an independent school that enrolls a student with a sensory disability under the *Schools Grants Programme* in 2010 is \$894. This could be supplemented by additional integration support funds that could amount to, at most, \$1,200 per annum (with a range from approximately \$400 –\$1,200).

Taking the specific case of a secondary student who is blind and uses Braille; it is apparent that the support necessary to provide equitable curriculum access greatly exceeds these levels of available funding. Indeed, it *may* be very considerable indeed. The annual costs could include:

Itinerant teacher support (including motor vehicle costs)	=	\$ 35,000 (plus)
Braille production	=	\$ 30,000 (plus)
TOTAL	=	\$ 65,000 (plus)

For a deaf student costs could include:

Itinerant teacher support (including motor vehicle costs)	=	\$ 20,000 (plus)
Speech pathology, etc	=	\$ 6,000 (plus)
TOTAL	=	\$ 26,000 (plus)

In the government education system, such specialist support, which is always considered necessary to support a student with a hearing or vision disability, is provided to students in the integrated setting via a range of direct funding mechanisms which go far beyond the provisions that can be made available to an independent school under the *Schools Grants Programme*. The cost of providing such support is borne by the state (i.e., by the community as a whole through taxation).

It is acknowledged that that there is an important and rightful role and responsibility for any school to provide the infrastructure necessary to support a student with a disability within their school program. However, it would appear an inequitable imposition upon a single independent school to have to bear the full cost of such provisions as a basis for providing equitable access to its programs by a student with a disability, when it is considered that government has determined that it will subsidise students without disabilities

to a level of approximately 50% of those operational costs—and often much more.

Further, and perhaps more importantly, it seems unfair and out of keeping with the “spirit” of the DDA for governments to administer a funding mechanism that is sufficiently inadequate to routinely allow any school—government or non-government—to be able to mount a successful defence of “unjustifiable hardship” when students with complex and costly support needs seek to enrol.

The latter issue seems particularly unfair and inequitable when government is actively promoting access to non-government schools through subsidy (funding) mechanisms that benefit non-disabled students and encourage their participation in this sector. If it is accepted that Australian schoolchildren with disabilities ought to have the same opportunity and choice in schooling as other Australian school students, then a number of changes might be constructive.

The most desirable system would be one that met the actual costs of additional support for students with disabilities on an equitable basis in both government and non-government schools. A strong social policy argument could be mounted to suggest that this should be 100% of the actual costs in both cases. At the very least, the proportion of the actual costs met in the case of non-government schools should be no less than the proportion of the cost of a non-disabled student’s education, which is currently met by government.

Recommendation:

That the Inquiry Report makes recommendations concerning the assurance of adequate levels of government funding to provide support for the integration of students with disabilities, regardless of whether those students attend government or non-government schools.

3.2.2 Adequacy of Teacher Training and Professional Development Opportunities

The issue considered here addresses term of reference 7.

At issue is the adequacy and accessibility of professional preparation programs for teachers of children with sensory disabilities.

The education of children with sensory disabilities requires a range of specialist professional skills and knowledge that go significantly beyond that required of either teachers in regular educational environments or those in other areas of special education.

In regard to the education of children who are deaf or hearing impaired, for example, a wide range of specialist professional skills and knowledge is

required. Such knowledge and skills go significantly beyond that required of either teachers in regular educational environments or those in other areas of special education. Requisite specialist skills and knowledge for teachers of children who are deaf or hearing impaired include, among others, the following:

- Knowledge of appropriate assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation methods and instruments for use with children who are deaf or hearing impaired;
- Comprehensive understanding of expressive and receptive language development and language-specific pedagogies for supporting acquisition of either (or both) spoken and signed language;
- Detailed knowledge of audiological interventions including the effective operation and utilization of hearing aids, cochlear implants, and other assistive listening devices;
- Detailed knowledge of a range of audiological conditions such as auditory neuropathy spectrum disorder, and the associated habilitation and educational correlates of those conditions;
- Detailed knowledge of acoustic phonetics and speech perception as a basis for teaching speech and listening skills associated with acquisition of oral language;
- High levels of facility with at least one of a wide range of possible educational methodologies which vary according to the mode of communication and language of instruction (spoken or signed) that is used with children who are deaf or hearing impaired;
- Detailed knowledge and appreciation of cultural, historical, emotional, social, legal, and educational issues in deafness and hearing impairment;
- Highly effective communication skills (including sign language skills to a high level for teachers working with children who use that mode of communication);
- Direct practical experience with students who are deaf or hearing impaired in a range of intervention/educational settings;
- Understanding of appropriate educational programming, classroom/behavioral management, and curriculum development for this population.

Similarly, for teachers of children who are blind or vision impaired requisite specialist skills and knowledge include, among others, the following:

- Detailed knowledge of vision assessment strategies and associated reporting formats and terminology;
- Functional knowledge of optical interventions including the effective operation and utilisation of a range of low vision aids and devices;
- Functional knowledge of a wide range of technologies for providing access to print-based materials for students who are blind or vision impaired ;
- Effective skills in the production of Braille;
- Working knowledge of orientation and mobility instruction strategies and techniques;

- Knowledge of appropriate assessment, diagnosis, and evaluation methods and instruments;
- Understanding of appropriate educational programming, classroom/behavioral management and curriculum development for this population;
- Direct practical experience with children who are blind or vision impaired, including those with multiple disabilities, in a range of educational settings.

Programs to provide this level of professional preparation are highly specialised and demand high levels of resources for effective delivery. However, hearing impairment and vision impairment are low-incidence conditions and the number of teachers who require such professional training is correspondingly low. In recent years, there has been a number of concerning trends in the provision of professional preparation in these areas and, also, in the requirements of employers (particularly at the school education level) for teachers who work with children with sensory disabilities.

Over the last 20 years, the knowledge and skill base required of teachers who are to work with students who are deaf and hearing impaired or blind and vision impaired has increased dramatically. Put simply, there is more to know about working with children with sensory disabilities than at any point in the history of the field.

In regard to hearing impairment, for example, new understandings, pedagogical advances, and improved technologies are all serving to ensure progressively better outcomes for children who are deaf or hearing impaired. They do not, however, serve to simplify the special educational needs of this population or the need for specialist intervention in their education. To the contrary, such developments have served to ensure that deaf children's educational needs have become ever more diverse and ever more complex. In many ways every new development serves to create more new "sub-groups" of learners who are deaf or hearing impaired that have their own particular learning needs and which place their own particular demands on the educational systems and the teachers who support them.

In this context, it is of concern therefore that, increasingly, some state education departments and some other employers of teachers in special education are advocating more generic, *less* specialized, and *less* intensive preparation as the minimum standard for preparation to fill the role of teaching these children.

Related to these trends has been a decrease in the number of Australian university programs operating in the specific area of education for children who are deaf or hearing impaired. That number has fallen from six in 1989 to just two in 2009. The issue here is not necessarily that having fewer programs is a negative outcome. Indeed, there is potential merit in the view that that quality is enhanced by concentrating specialised expertise and training capability and not -diluting it across a large number of programs. The real issue is what has happened in terms of the number of graduate students

undertaking training and the relaxation of the requirements of employing authorities for teachers of deaf children to achieve appropriate levels of training and, by inference, appropriate levels of expertise. It is these factors that have led to the decreased demand for university programs.

In 1989, university-level programs in education of the deaf or education of the blind/vision impaired were typically at the Graduate Diploma level, and required a student to undertake one year of full time of study or two years (four semesters) of part-time study including 45 days of supervised practicum across a range of educational settings for children who are deaf or hearing impaired or blind and vision impaired. The total number of hours of dedicated coursework in education of the deaf, for example, was approximately 325. In one of the two programs still operating in Australia, the number of dedicated contact hours has fallen to just 144 hours. Notably in that same period of time, the average contact hours dedicated to education of the deaf in programs in North America has *risen*. The benchmark program at Washington University (St. Louis, USA), for example, requires 660 contact hours and the program at York University (Toronto, Canada) requires 432 contact hours in deafness and hearing impairment related coursework.

International experience clearly indicates that the specialist skills required to operate effectively as a teacher of children with sensory disabilities cannot be adequately covered in the context of a generic special education program (even with some limited specialist input) and cannot be adequately covered in a specialist program with too few hours of appropriate coursework. There is a clear and urgent need to ensure that all university level programs that are seeking to prepare teachers to work in education of the deaf are able to deliver the comprehensive course content necessary to cover the broad and expanding range of skills required by teachers in those roles.

Effective professional training in this area should continue to be, at a minimum, a one-year program of highly specialised full-time equivalent study. Even then, however, there will be a need for an extensive program of ongoing in-service education at a postgraduate level to train teachers effectively to deal with the growing diversity of needs of children in this population.

As already noted, appropriately specialised professional training for teachers of the deaf and teachers of children who are blind or vision impaired is extremely resource-intensive with appropriately low-level demand. In order to sustain this provision and to ensure that quality programming is made available and accessible nationally, there is a need to ensure adequate government support for training initiatives such as the one undertaken by joint venture between the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children and the University of Newcastle.

It was in the context of the diminishing provision of professional training and research initiatives that the Royal Institute for Deaf and Blind Children and the University of Newcastle resolved to create the Renwick Centre as a centre for professional training and research. Since 1994, the Centre has produced over 480 graduate teachers of the deaf and teachers of students with vision

impairments. This program has partially reversed the alarming trend of diminished training opportunity and research provision in this highly specialised area. However, this has been achieved only through a mechanism that depends upon non-government funding and infrastructure support and is working in the context of increased difficulty in attracting students into a full-fee paying postgraduate education environment (i.e., as is now the norm for postgraduate education more broadly).

The need for government support to subsidise the provision of highly specialised and high quality training options in this area is paramount. Reliance on generic training in special education or training for teachers of children with other disabling conditions cannot be considered as a substitute for such requisite specialised training.

Recommendation:

RIDBC recommends that the Inquiry make recommendations concerning (a) the need to ensure a nexus between appropriate qualification and the deployment of teachers to work with the population of children with sensory disabilities in early intervention, preschool, and school environments; (b) the assurance of adequate levels of government funding to provide for the ongoing provision of highly specialised teacher training for teachers of children with sensory disabilities, and (c) the need for government to fund mechanisms for ensuring that teachers are encouraged to undertake such training (e.g., through funded scholarships or the availability of HECS-liable or HECS-exempt places in postgraduate training programs).