

## **INQUIRY INTO TRANSITION SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS WITH ADDITIONAL OR COMPLEX NEEDS AND THEIR FAMILIES**

**Organisation:** National Disability Coordination Officer Program,  
University of Western Sydney

**Date received:** 15/08/2011

---



---

**National Disability Coordination Officer Program  
University of Western Sydney**

Locked Bag 1797, Penrith, NSW 2751

Ph: 02 9678 7378

Email: [ndco@uws.edu.au](mailto:ndco@uws.edu.au)

Director: Dr Sev Ozdowski OAM

[s.ozdowski@uws.edu.au](mailto:s.ozdowski@uws.edu.au)

The Hon Niall Blair MLC  
Chair, Standing Committee on Social Issues  
Parliament House  
Macquarie St  
Sydney NSW 2000  
Fax: (02) 9230 2981

Dear Mr Blair,

**RE: Inquiry into transitional support for students with additional and/or complex needs**

The Western Sydney National Disability Coordination Officer Program welcomes the opportunity to present a submission into the above enquiry. We specifically refer to the transition from secondary school to employment, further education, or other post-school options.

**The National Disability Coordinator Officer Program**

The National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) Program is funded through the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR). There are presently 31 NDCO regions in Australia, 10 NDCO regions in New South Wales, each situated within a host organisation. The University of Western Sydney hosts 3 NDCO regions who comprise the Western Sydney National Disability Coordination Officer (WSNDCO) Program. The program began in January 2008 and is funded through 30 June, 2012. For more information please see: [www.uws.edu.au/ndco](http://www.uws.edu.au/ndco).

The goals of the NDCO program are to:

- **Improve transitions** to help people with disability move from school or the community into post-school education and training and subsequent employment.

- **Increase participation** by people with disability in higher education, vocational education and training and employment.
- **Establish better links** between schools, universities, TAFEs, training providers and disability service providers so that they can work together to provide the best possible assistance for people with disability.

NDCOs play a leading role in helping students with a disability make the transition from school to further education and training (including TAFE, private training organisations, and University), or from study to employment and, in so doing, help to increase access and participation rates. The WSNDCOs also work closely with school transition staff from all sectors (public, Catholic and Independent) along with post school employment and education service providers through Vocational Support Networks that meet once a school term within Department of Education and Communities (DEC) regions within NSW. NDCOs work collaboratively across sectors and with each other on a state and national basis and therefore are well placed to observe and comment on cross sector issues relating to the coordination and provision of services to students with disabilities.

#### **The adequacy and accessibility of appropriate support for children and their families.**

- Within DEC, Support Teachers Transition (STT) are critical to a successful transition for school leavers with disability to post school education, training or employment. Due to restructuring within DEC, STTs now have to wait to be invited into schools to organise transition planning which impacts on their resources of time and planning. We recommend the STT role in transition planning needs to be clarified and promoted within DEC, ensuring students in both supported and mainstream classes receive access to planned transition planning. As well there needs to be adequate staffing of STTs within DEC regions to ensure student need is met.
- It is our experience that many private sector VET providers lack awareness of their legislative responsibility to provide for the support needs of students who have a disability, nor do they have access to specialist resource staff to assist students. This equates to low levels of participation in training offered through private providers and confusion for parents and school leavers.
- A recent survey of 397 people across Australia (44.8% from NSW) conducted by the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (see [http://www.ayac.org.au/uploads/AYAC%20Submission%20-%20ReviewDisabilityStandards\\_Final\[1\].pdf](http://www.ayac.org.au/uploads/AYAC%20Submission%20-%20ReviewDisabilityStandards_Final[1].pdf)) identified that only 57% of respondents with

disability were even aware of the existence of the Disability Standards for Education. This is of concern and has implications for the ability of people with disabilities to advocate for the support they are entitled to. This is of particular importance during transition points when people are trying to navigate a new system. We recommend NSW taking a lead in raising awareness of the Disability Standards for Education.

- The results of NSW Aging, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) post school assessments for eligibility for either Community Participation or Transition to Work are not available until term 4 of Year 12. Earlier notification would enable a smoother transition and orientation to chosen post school setting especially for students with high support needs whose condition does not change.
- NSW ADHC funded programs (Community Participation and Transition to Work) start in January/February and Year 12 school leavers (who exit school at the end of term 3) have to wait. Being able to access a program earlier would enable them to maintain skills, and also alleviate the impact on families (financially and emotionally) who often need to take time off work or make other arrangement to fill this gap.
- There is a lack of suitable NSW ADHC funded Community Participation Program settings in some areas. As students stay in this program indefinitely this is a planning issue which needs to be addressed to ensure adequate places are available for school leavers with complex disabilities.
- The NSW ADHC funded Transition to Work Program runs for 3 days per week and there are no clear options for the other 2 days. This again has the potential to place emotional and financial burden on the family.
- More funding is required to support students with challenging behaviours - particularly in the transition period. We have heard of students being 'suspended' from ADHC post-school programs for lengthy periods until behaviour issues are addressed. This can take an unreasonable period of time (we have heard of cases up to 5 months) placing additional emotional and financial burden on the family.
- Funding for support is inadequate across all education sectors to meet student need. We are aware of families who are funding support and special equipment themselves, for example parents attending post secondary education institutions in order to provide attendant care services for their child.
- Assistive technology is critical to supporting school leavers with complex disabilities to access employment and further education. Currently any technology that is provided through school

does not move with the school leaver into post-school settings, leaving them to have to source these resources again. This often takes time, leaving students with a gap in access to technology during the critical transition period.

- Coordinated transfer of information from school to the post school provider is critical in ensuring a successful transition. Currently there is no single form that school staff can complete and many service providers have their own form. This is time consuming and confusing for families and schools who are often required to provide the same information multiple times.
- For people with high support needs considering university, there is a gap in services around the provision of personal care, often meaning the person cannot attend university.
- More funding is required within schools to adequately prepare students for post school education, employment and other post school programs.

**Point 2: Best practice approaches to ensure seamless and streamlined assistance during transitions.**

- Ensure that any changes to NSW State funded services or education departments are in line with existing Australian Government funded services.
- Support the development of one form capturing relevant information about a school leaver with disability which can be completed by school staff and given to both the student and the initial service provider. This would reduce duplication of effort and confusion for families and schools.
- Define a single point of entry at schools for any service providers wanting to access students with disability whether they be in mainstream or support classes.
- Resource Post School Programs to meet the need and cover the gap between school leaving and the start of the post school program. Ensure that assessments can be done in Year 11 when appropriate and assessment results available in term 2, in order to put in place an effective transition.
- The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has recently released a publication entitled “Inclusion of Students with Disabilities in Tertiary Education and Employment” which provides many useful recommendations around successful transition planning. Please refer to the full report at [www.oecd.org/document/0,3746,en\\_2649\\_37455\\_47953762\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_37455,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/document/0,3746,en_2649_37455_47953762_1_1_1_37455,00.html)
- Many of the recommendations in the above mentioned report relate to the importance of enhanced linkages between all stakeholders to “foster continuity and coherent paths between educational

levels and sectors" (page 11). The NDCO program is uniquely placed to play the role of improving linkages between the school, further education and training, and employment sectors. The future of the NDCO program beyond June 2012 is unclear and DEEWR is currently conducting an evaluation of the program. We would encourage the NSW Government to lobby for the continuation and expansion of the NDCO program.

**Point 3: Any other related matters.**

- The WSNDCO program has developed a range of resources and activities designed to enhance the transition of people with disabilities from school into further education and training or employment. We would welcome any opportunity to raise further awareness of these resources within NSW.
  - WSNDCO website *Get Ready for Study and Work*: [www.uws.edu.au/ndco](http://www.uws.edu.au/ndco)
  - WSNDCO website *Get Ready for Uni*: [www.uws.edu.au/ndco/getready](http://www.uws.edu.au/ndco/getready)
  - *Get Ready for Study and Work: A transition planning workbook for students with a disability*:  
[http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndco/pdf/Getreadyworkbook\\_2010.pdf](http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndco/pdf/Getreadyworkbook_2010.pdf)
  - *Get Students Ready for Life After School: Transition Poster Resource for Students with a Disability* :  
<http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndco/pdf/Resources/WSNDCOTransitionResourcePoster.pdf>
  - *Enhancing the Links* –Presentations from a full day training for close to 400 Education and Service Provider staff involved in transitions for students with disability held in Western Sydney in May and June 2011: <http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndco/links/presentations.htm>
  - Vocational Support Networks in Sydney:  
[http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndco/pdf/Sydney%20VSNs\\_2011.pdf](http://pubsites.uws.edu.au/ndco/pdf/Sydney%20VSNs_2011.pdf)

Dr Sev Ozdowski OAM  
Director, Equity and Diversity  
University of Western Sydney

12<sup>th</sup> August 2011