

Submission
No 544

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

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**NSW Council for
Intellectual Disability**

www.nswcid.org.au

Submission

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

February 2010

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Index	Page No
Letter of Introduction	4
Terms of Reference:	
1. The nature, level and adequacy of funding for the education of children with a Disability	7
2. Best practice approaches in determining the allocation of funding to children with a disability, particularly whether allocation should be focused on a student's functioning capacity rather than their disability	9
3. The level and adequacy of current special education places within the education System	10
4. The adequacy of integrated support services for children with a disability in mainstream settings, such as school classrooms	12
5. The provision of a suitable curriculum for intellectually disabled and conduct disordered students	14
6. Student and family access to professional support and services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and school counsellors	16
7. The provision of adequate teaching training, both in terms of pre-service and ongoing professional training	18
8. Any other related matters.	20
Concluding Remarks	23
References	24



NSW Council for Intellectual Disability

21 February 2010

General Purpose Standing Committee No. 2
NSW Parliament
Macquarie St
Sydney 2000

Dear Committee,

Re: Inquiry into the provision of education to students with a disability or special needs

"...this requires the interrogation and debunking of traditional attitudes, ideologies and expertise which label students with disabilities as defective. ...Inclusion is a political concern which addresses the issues of who belongs and who does not belong, and how we might reframe our curriculum, our ways of teaching and our school organization in order to enable all students to learn together."¹

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to this important Inquiry. Our submission is structured to address the particular terms of reference outlined for this Inquiry. We have also included an introduction to raise a range of general points that we believe are relevant to the focus of the Inquiry.

About us

New South Wales Council for Intellectual Disability (NSW CID) is the peak body representing the rights and interests of people with intellectual disability in NSW. Our Board is made up of a majority of people with intellectual disability, and people with intellectual disability are not only consulted on, but drive the work that we do. NSW CID engages in systemic advocacy and policy development, as well as providing a state-wide information service called ASKCID.

Introduction

NSW CID is of the view that the learning needs of students with disability or special needs in NSW are not being adequately or consistently met and that there is significant room for improvement in regard to this group of disadvantaged students. However, NSW CID is also of the view that this Inquiry is well placed to highlight where the system can be improved – key issues can be addressed by continuing to develop and implement evidence-based, sustainable and innovative approaches that meet the needs of students, teachers, schools and the wider community.

¹ Slee, R & Cook, S., *Disabling or Enabling?* Youth Studies Australia, Autumn, 1993 p36

From the outset, NSW CID is of the view that believes that some key systemic changes are required, and in order for these changes to be effectively implemented, the following commitments are required:

- Commitment to students with disability and special needs who are part of the current and future education systems
- Commitment to the educators – a recognition of the special skills and requirements of educators in this area
- Commitment to change the current system to move toward a more inclusive and responsive model - there is significant room for improvement in order for the education system in NSW across the Board to become more inclusive of children with disabilities and special needs

In this submission, NSW CID will offer a range of suggestions which we believe would improve the current system.

NSW CID strongly recommends that the Inquiry examine the education system as it sits within a wider social and bureaucratic context, allowing for the reality that many children with special needs and their families are often engaged with other agencies such as Ageing Disability and Home Care (ADHC), the Department of Community Services (DOCs), the Department of Health, Centrelink and potentially numerous service providers such as respite carers, medical specialists, therapists, recreation services and accommodation supports. NSW CID supports a more cohesive and accessible system that makes it easier for parents to collaborate with all stakeholders in their child's life and who will assist with ongoing development. Building capacity of both families and stakeholders to do this can only improve outcomes for the children they support.

NSW CID recognises that some of the suggestions within this submission point to broader structural changes which will provide some challenges for government. It is hopeful to note that "the process of significant change in Finland occurred over more than a decade, but the first steps towards change were taken immediately" (MacKay 2006:61). NSW CID is anticipating that the NSW Government is ready to embrace such a challenge and begin the process of building a more inclusive education system that benefits all students and the community.

During the process of researching for this submission, NSW CID has encountered examples of where students, parents and teachers report that the system is currently working well, though we must highlight the fact that this was the exception rather than the rule. Where the system is working well however, there are some clear indications of why this is the case. The common thread appears to be motivated, committed teachers, team approaches, parent involvement and strong

positive leadership which is supportive of a genuinely inclusive approach. In this submission, rather than focus on the deficits of the current system, we will suggest ways to strengthen the capacity of schools to empower staff, parents and students alike.

NSW CID endorses the following key points:

- Students with disabilities and special needs should be embraced and included within mainstream schools as much as possible, including when students are being educated in support units which are located within mainstream settings. Schools should be encouraged to develop and build on inclusive practices, for the benefit of students with special needs and the broader school community.
- Students with special needs require more from their schools in regard to behaviour support, and other support infrastructure. NSW CID supports models of education where parents can be kept more effectively in the loop about their child's progress, where teachers, parents and allied health professionals can work together in a capacity building, rather than an expert model, to improve the child's quality of life both within school and more broadly.
- Current access to allied health professionals by students within schools is unacceptable and needs to be improved as a matter of priority.
- Many teachers have reported that there are ongoing problems with curriculum in regard to students with special needs, either in regard to the applicability and relevance of the current curriculum for some students, or the implementation of the current curriculum and how well teachers are supported to do this.

NSW CID would be pleased to have the opportunity to submit oral evidence if required. Please contact NSW CID on 9211 1611 should you require any additional information or wish to discuss this submission further.

Kind regards,

Carol Berry
Executive Director
NSW Council for Intellectual Disability

Terms of Reference

1. The nature, level and adequacy of funding for the education of children with a disability

Increases in funding would certainly go a long way to ensuring a better integrated education system to support all students and their needs. However, in NSW CID's view, a need for increased funding is only part of the solution. A shift in culture is what is required more urgently than anything else. Students with disability must be recognised and treated as equal to other students in the school – included in the same way, appreciated and valued in the same way as regular students.

A common sentiment that is expressed by relevant professionals within schools is that the funding system currently makes it difficult to engage in long term planning for both students and staff. They give the example of units being shutdown when one child successfully transitions to mainstream schooling, taking their funding allocation with them. Parents have given examples of being pressured to keep their child in segregated units so that other students do not have to move schools if one child leaves and their funding is critical to the unit being operational. Teachers and school leaders indicate that the challenge of retaining quality staff, developing teams and creating stability for the students is a difficult task. A clearer shift toward a non-segregated model could combat much of this issue, with expertise and skills remaining in the general mainstream school environment.

Parents and teachers have also expressed experiencing difficulty in the current system in regard to accessing funding. Common opinions expressed by these groups are that the current system is lacking transparency, it is not user friendly, timely, nor does the final outcome accurately provide sufficient funding for student support needs. The funding system also appears to be confusing for those who utilise it - all parents and teachers consulted by NSW CID gave varied and differing responses to how funding was allocated. In addition to this, many explained that they felt there was no guarantee that funding would be consistent each year and that programs often changed leaving them in limbo until a replacement was introduced. There were also some examples provided of frustrating funding decisions, for example, successful programs that were trialled as pilots yet never implemented – an example given by a primary school teacher was the use of a speech pathologist for children with learning difficulties to assist with improving literacy which operational for two terms then no funding was provided for it to continue. This was despite significant student achievement in the program and the additional benefit of the teachers involved learning from the speech pathologist's instruction, programs and resources.

NSW CID has explored the possibility of a fully inclusive system in NSW as a more equitable system of education and indeed, international studies conducted by both the World Bank and OECD have shown that “it is far more expensive to operate dual systems of ordinary and 'special' education than it is to operate a single inclusive system.” (Rustierner 2006:1). An example of this can be observed in Iceland where it has been calculated that “the cost of educating a child requiring the most intensive support in mainstream school was no greater than the average cost of sending students to special schools” (Rustierner 2006:2). NSW CID would encourage the Inquiry to consider the benefits of planning for the creation of a more inclusive system in NSW, and that the Inquiry should consider the possible benefits of redirecting school funding from separate units into mainstream schooling. This would allow for significant investment into teacher support, professional training and development in all schools.

2. Best practice approaches in determining the allocation of funding to children with a disability, particularly whether allocation should be focused on a student's functioning capacity rather than their disability

A collaborative person centred approach is to be strived for when determining support needs and funding, as it places the individual at the centre of the process.

It is NSW CID's view that allocation of funding should absolutely be based on a student's functioning capacity rather than their disability. Further to this there also needs to be consideration of the skill of the student's teacher and the needs of the school community when determining allocation of resources. There is much variance in the education, experience and training of teachers as well as the leadership provided in schools that impacts directly on a student's success.

Assessment for funding that is based on the learning and support needs of the students can also allow for the inclusion of the learning environment in the allocation process. Family Advocacy NSW also reinforces this notion with the recommendation that "that the Funding Support process should have an additional instrument that takes account of knowledge, skills and experience of the teacher". We believe that this notion is worthy of closer examination by the Inquiry to determine where best practice approaches can be supported by funding mechanisms which support positive outcomes.

To further examine this point, Thomas and Russell, argue that we are "drowning in data about education, yet we lack the measures for monitoring and ensuring the entitlement to education and training the most marginalised" (in Wyn 2009:56). NSW CID would support further investigation into more equitable allocation mechanisms that focus on student learning support needs. An allocation method must be sustainable and ensure sufficient flexibility to account for changes in the student's development, learning needs, influences from external environments and the school's capacity to provide quality education.

Further evidence from Finland advises that categorisation of disability is not necessarily the most progressive method of determining funding needs. In Finland, the overriding policy direction is that learning disabilities can be overcome through diagnosis at the earliest stage and skilled training (Kivirauma & Kivinen, 1988). In fact, there is no definition of the categories of special educational needs and this is enshrined in legislation. The use of the categories is only to place emphasis on "preparing an individual curriculum plan and rehabilitation programme for each pupil" (UNESCO, 1995, p.107). While NSW CID has some reservations about this approach it demonstrates that other jurisdictions are experimenting with different approaches and that these approaches are certainly worthy of closer examination and consideration to draw on best practice around the world.

3. The level and adequacy of current special education places within the education system

We are of the view that this particular area of investigation by the Inquiry may be somewhat misguided in its focus. Whether there are enough places in SSPs or support units really comes down to whether you support the existence of these segregated learning environments in the first place, and whether we should uphold status quo as the best possible model of educating students with special needs. Where support units and SSPs exist and a segregated model of education is determined to be the best way forward for the majority of students with moderate to high support needs, the places within these segregated educational contexts will most probably be filled.

A 14 year old student interviewed in our consultation process stated that *"I just want to be in the same class as everyone else"*. Currently this student is in a separate unit and her and her parents have been advised that it is probably best that she 'finish school at the end of year ten', as they did not have the resources to support her to continue further in her education. This student has attended four different schools in her lifetime, three of which are not in her local area. As this student also has some health care needs, which the school has difficulty in meeting, the parent regularly has to travel to the school to assist his daughter. Currently this is a major contributing factor in this parent being unable to seek regular employment. For this family, having a place in a mainstream local school, would provide the opportunities for inclusion that they are desperately seeking.

Many parents have indicated to NSW CID that currently there is limited choice in where their child can access school. Parents are advised that special units are the 'best' choice, often these are not in a local area placing increased pressure on families and carers. It also impedes involvement in the local community and developing friendship networks, for both the parents and the children. This further reinforces a notion of segregation. Students and parents interviewed for this submission have expressed their disappointment at having to move schools numerous times, due to units becoming "no longer feasible due to economic reasons". This has had the impact of causing further stress on students and families when they have to transition to another area and become familiar with new teachers, communities, transport options and support staff.

NSW CID strongly believes that to encourage more inclusive school classrooms and environments, leaders in both education and community sectors have a responsibility to promote the benefits of inclusion to the wider community. Attitudinal barriers are commonly stated as prohibitive factors in children with disabilities being able to fully participate in school environments. Research indicates that there are substantial benefits in having inclusive classrooms; "the benefits of educating children with intellectual disabilities alongside those without disabilities can be better communicated to the public in order to further strengthen support for

inclusion and increase available educational resources to address the remaining challenges” (Burge 2008: 18)

According to research conducted by Graham, it is not uncommon for children with disabilities to be excluded from school due to insufficient support – “some school principals are limiting the time disabled students are in class to match the hours a teacher’s aide, or other assistance is available” (Ferrari 2009). NSW CID recommends that sufficient supports should be provided in mainstream settings that enable children to attend school full time.

4. The adequacy of integrated support services for children with a disability in mainstream settings, such as school classrooms.

There is definitely room for improvement in regard to the adequacy of integrated support services for children with a disability in mainstream settings.

At present, the teacher's aide system has its benefits but there may be models that work more effectively in regard to how teachers and students can be supported to improve the mainstream classroom experience for children with a disability.

NSW CID understands that teacher's aides and teacher's aides (special) provide crucial support to the classroom. There does however appear to be much variance in the role they play. Teacher's aides can commonly be seen as babysitters - one teacher's aide reported to NSW CID that teachers often assume that the child with special needs is the teacher's aide's sole responsibility, comments such as "that one's yours" or "send him to the teacher's aide" were common occurrences. Parents and teachers confirm that many students spend the majority of their time with the teacher's aides. NSW CID does not believe that this is an effective use of support, the person with the least training spending time with the person with the most complex learning needs. NSW CID supports the Australian Association of Special Educators' position paper on teacher aides.

There are many additional supports that could be utilised to support children in mainstream classes, though these are not comprehensively in use throughout classrooms. Initiatives include:

- Support Teachers Learning Assistants (STLAs) allocated to each school, so they can actively demonstrate and model support
- STLAs involved in team teaching on a regular basis, so that expertise can be shared with the entire class as well as the teacher and the student with special needs
- Providing teachers with education on how to best utilize teachers aides
- Collaborative partnerships with other community educators to enhance learning

NSW CID strongly supports having the expertise of an STLA attached to each school. This ensures:

- that problems can be managed in a timely manner
- that constant reinforcement of positive approaches can occur
- curriculum adjustments can be modeled and monitored
- rapport can develop between teachers and the STLA
- all students are benefiting from a more skilled team of staff
- ongoing professional development and mentoring can occur
- assistance can be provided in creating suitable resources
- children, families and teachers can be supported facilitate positive transitions to school and between segregated units and mainstream settings.

Research indicates that having an STLA attached to a school not only improves student outcomes academically but also supports the social inclusion of students in wider contexts. It also suggests that teachers will learn through collaboration if they are given the time and opportunity to do so and that is indeed one of the most effective methods of teachers implementing inclusive teaching practices. (Pearce, Shaddock, Martin)

5. The provision of a suitable curriculum for intellectually disabled and conduct disordered students

It is our understanding that many special education teachers have concerns in regard to the relevance of the current curriculum for some students, or that some teachers struggle with its implementation. We believe that this issue is worthy of some closer consideration and examination by this Inquiry. Some teachers and allied health professionals reported that a focus on functional skills and communication abilities need to be given greater recognition as useful school based activity within a curriculum base for students with a disability.

It may well be that generally the curriculum is adequate, with its philosophical underpinning based on the concept of universal design – allowing sufficient flexibility within the curriculum so that all learners can achieve learning goals and participate. However, many teachers (particularly in SSPs) expressed irritation and frustration with the current curriculum for some students and we are of the view that this issue should be investigated further.

Some researchers, for example, Bennett suggests that teachers “use a variety of instructional methods, including differential instruction and universal design” (Bennett 2009:3) to adequately adapt the curriculum for individual students. The Inquiry may find this to be the case. However, teachers need also to be able to assess student progress in ways that will support improved achievement. Ratios in class and the time constraints are common responses as to why students are not always exposed to the entire breadth of the curriculum. Many teachers do not currently benefit from adequate relief time to research alternatives, access resources or collaborate with other professionals, making adjustments in this context is difficult.

NSW CID proposes that having a Support Teacher Learning Assistant attached to every school is vital in addressing this problem. Also critical to implementation of the curriculum is the provision of appropriate resources such as pictorial aids, audio visual material, assistive technologies, sensory equipment, easy read material and so forth that enable the student to actively engage in a manner that matches their learning style. This could be improved by allowing teachers and teacher’s aide’s time to develop these strategies and to also share these with other teachers and classroom as “planning and programming works best collaboratively” (Bennett 2009:1).

NSW CID understands that many parents are supportive of the curriculum, especially the life skills components that teach practical skills that improve their children’s abilities to be able to participate in the community independently. However, individual learning needs should always remain paramount so that students who have the capacity to engage more actively or at a higher level are not prohibited to do so.

It is also critical that any curriculum adjustments are monitored and reviewed at regular intervals to guarantee that they are appropriate to the student needs and that the best possible strategies are being used. Support Teachers in the current School Learning Support Program interviewed for this submission indicated that teachers required ongoing monitoring and support to problem solve, be creative and responsive to individual student requirements. Also beneficial was professional development that included numerous practical examples of curriculum and subject adjustments. This could be facilitated at a school and regional level using face to face and online discussion sessions as well as a wider state level again utilising online discussions. Again, relief from face to face teaching was also recommended as essential in giving teachers the opportunity to plan suitable adjustments.

Equipping teachers to be able to accommodate such diversity in a classroom is pivotal for all students. Facilitating more active engagement – using interactive teaching techniques, specific instructional design methods and teaching to learning styles - exposes all students to a richer learning experience. (Pearce, Arthur-Kelly, Vinson)

6. Student and family access to professional support and services, such as speech therapy, occupational therapy, physiotherapy and school counsellors

Waiting lists for allied health supports are lengthy; examples given across the state included many months in a number of different regions. Many parents also expressed that some allied health had no understanding of the needs of children with disabilities, that they often “waited a long period of time to see someone who had no experience”. Teachers have informed NSW CID that “the parents who can afford private services gain better outcomes for their children”. This is simply not equitable.

NSW CID advocates for school-based health and social supports to accommodate a range of disabilities, easing the burden on parents, families, school counsellors and teachers. “Educational jurisdictions do not currently fund these professionals in schools at a level where they can have significant impact on most schools” (Wyn 2009:36). Similar to an early intervention model, the use of multi-disciplinary teams would be a positive approach to ensuring students had the correct support locally, quickly and that interventions can be proactive rather than reactive. It also enables a more coordinated approach in scenarios where therapy or specific programs are designed. Creating this environment can prove extremely crucial in skill development and preventing “learning failure”. (NSW Dept of Ed – The Challenge of Diversity).

In Canada there have been trials of inclusive education systems that work in conjunction with the local community and health services. For example “in Ontario, the Ministries of Community and Social Services and of Children and Youth Services together fund numerous programs for children with intellectual disabilities and their families to promote inclusion” (Burge 2008:17). The benefits of this have been reported to be many - comprehensive service delivery, physical and psychological needs of children addressed, learning between professionals and early intervention.

The introduction of such a model also contributes to teachers having the correct support to actually spend their time teaching rather than negotiating with numerous external agencies. Based on NSW CID’s research, it was found that many teachers often undertook the role of case worker in supporting families to find the appropriate service for their child. One teacher stated that “with some families they have so many competing needs that it would simply not happen if it was left up to them to pursue where to find a speech pathologist”.

A significant proportion of parents and professionals interviewed felt that having a ‘one stop shop’ where allied health professionals are more accessible within schools would create a more cohesive, accessible and streamlined service. Parents said the benefits would be multiple – less transport time, “not having to explain oneself over and over”, completing less paper work and documentation and; an increase in the communication between relevant professionals and families.

It is noted that there may be additional difficulties in engaging and retaining allied health staff in regional and remote areas. Suggestions to combat this from regional programs in Canada are the allocation of additional money to recruit and retain staff. (Mc Kay 2006: 36). Also recommended is local areas having the flexibility to utilise staff on a 'as needs basis', so that funds can be tailored to local need rather than a ratio or requirement.

To envisage such a proposal working in NSW there would require significant support and collaboration from the Departments of Health, Community Services and Education. As in overseas models, aligning these resources to the same regions and boundaries made access to services much easier. It would take decisive leadership to create such inter-governmental cooperation.

7. The provision of adequate teaching training, both in terms of pre-service and ongoing professional training

NSW CID strongly endorses initiatives that further develop the skills of teachers, and give them the professional development and respect that they deserve within challenging learning environments. There is significant research and evidence that highlights the pivotal role teachers in determining the success a student has in their school, classroom and community:

- “Committed and skilled teachers who are properly supported can make inclusion work” (Porter 2008:5).
- “There are teachers who become more inclusive after they have successful experiences in teaching children with disabilities - improving pedagogy therefore increases the chances of having successful experiences” (Pearce 2009:5)
- “There is evidence to suggest that, for administrators, additional training in the area of special education as well as positive experiences with students with exceptionalities are important components for developing and maintaining inclusive environments” ((Bennett 2009:3)

NSW CID is of the firm view that whilst teachers do have some exposure to the education of students with disability in their studies at the current time this is by no means adequate. Many special education teachers find that mainstream class teachers do not understand or value the work that they do, let alone understanding or valuing the students that they teach. Improving the way that teachers are educated in this respect would go a long way toward building an education system that is genuinely inclusive of children with a disability. Initiatives suggested by NSW CID recognize the complexity and high level of expertise that special education teachers possess. Rather than continuing to place increased demands on these teachers, we would propose initiatives that allow for teachers to share these skills amongst their peers and provide support to collaborate effectively with all stakeholders in the education system.

Teachers consulted by NSW CID that taught people with intellectual disabilities in mainstream classrooms, advised that too often they did not have the appropriate skills or time to implement alternate teaching strategies for these students. Relief from face to face teaching time is essential, not just to ensure that teachers can remain up skilled and prepared for classrooms, but also for maintaining a reasonable workload. A further consistent theme from this group was that there is inadequate

time allocated to create specific resources, tailor curriculums and individualise programs, though they desired to do this. In addition to this many teachers indicated that they had not been trained in instructional design and strategies that were more suitable for children with learning difficulties.

NSW CID concurs with the Australian Association of Special Education that “after graduation, teachers and administrators require systematic development of their skills, knowledge and values, to ensure curriculum and instruction practices benefit all students, and are based on research validated principles”. (AASE 2004:6) Special educators interviewed as part of this suggested that many mainstream teachers did not have the confidence to support students with behavioural problems, including those with conduct disorders. Many teachers feared having students with violent or aggressive behaviour in their class rooms; some even after the student had been assessed as no longer posing a risk. An assistant principal of a unit for emotional disturbed students stated that “our unit is constantly faced with negative attitudes from both teachers and leaders in mainstream schools that believe it is easier for the student to remain at our unit rather than accommodating their needs to return”. Approaches that were successful involved intensive model and education of the teacher, this assisted in reducing apprehension and removing attitudinal barriers. The assistant principal e spoke with believes that at times “the learning needs of the teachers are more challenging than the student”.

This anecdotal evidence is supported by the AASE Position Statement on Pre-Service Teacher Training. Research indicates that “coaching and mentoring have been shown to be most effective in assisting classroom teachers to use research-based techniques (Malouf & Schiller, 1995), and thus should be a component of practicum experience for pre-service teachers and a means of further development of practising teachers. Such practical experience should be gained by working with trained and competent special educators.” (AASE 2004: 6)

NSW CID is aware that “current approaches to teacher professional development in Australia are pitifully fragmented and often superficial”.² This is clearly an area that would need to be addressed and suitable infrastructure established when planning to have a more inclusive model. One such measure would be having an STLA at every school to advice, support and instruct teachers on a regular rather than ad hoc and itinerant fashion.

2

http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Policy_Dialogue/48th_ICE/CONFINTED_48_Inf_2_English.pdf

8. Any other related matters.

Tertiary Education

While the main focus of this Inquiry is on primary and secondary education, NSW CID wanted to take the opportunity to mention some ongoing problems that we have encountered in the TAFE system for people with disability.

It has come to NSW CID's attention that there are major problems regarding the provision of both mainstream and Access courses at NSW TAFE campuses across the state. Access courses refer to the programs that have been designed specifically for people with disabilities and include reasonable adjustments to meet the diverse needs of the students. "Access programs are often the only choice for many people with disabilities and the decline in the availability will continue to have a detrimental impact on both educational and vocational outcomes for some of the most disadvantaged members of our society". (Teacher Consultant at the SWSI TAFE 2009)

It has been suggested that due to the commercialisation of both TAFE, and the Vocational Education Training industry, many changes are occurring that directly impact on the availability and allocation of funding for courses. TAFE, though a public provider of education, is competing for funding to deliver courses, and in order to offer cost competitive courses is making fundamental changes to current arrangements to remain in the adult education market.

Some of the direct impacts for students with intellectual disability include:

- Less courses available at a suitable entry level - "TAFE institutes most commonly nominated the group of people with low literacy and numeracy skills as facing barriers to accessing and completing training" (Impact of TAFE Inclusiveness Strategies, NCVET, 2008). Without such courses as the Access program and Certificate 1 & 2 Level courses, people with intellectual disability will be unable to access education that is suitable for their needs.
- A Teacher Consultant with TAFE NSW states that "the decline in the provision of access programs has resulted in many students with disabilities (intellectual disabilities, particular) not accessing any program or accessing inappropriate programs at higher levels with poor outcomes".
- No funding increases to provide direct support for learners such as assistance with completing assessments, time management and review sessions. Documentation from the South Western Sydney Institute has indicated that since 2002 there has been a 150% increase in the cost of disability assistance but no increase in budget allocation. In terms of hourly support it has meant that it can now only offer 6117 hours of support as opposed to the 15244 hours of support it offered in 2009.

- Staffing qualifications are downgraded to save on salaries and not all teachers are specialised in teaching people with learning difficulties. For example a teacher may only possess a certificate IV in training and assessment as opposed to a degree in special education.
- Some course such as vocational certificates, are offered only for fee paying students through TAFE Plus, not TAFE NSW. This clearly presents a barrier for people on low incomes and further prolongs people's transition to open employment positions.
- Reasonable adjustments are becoming seen as too costly and therefore course are not tailored to meet individuals learning needs.

As TAFE is the leading provider of Vocational Education and Training in NSW, it is critical that measures are developed that promote positive educational opportunities for people with intellectual disabilities – without TAFE people are left with very limited choices in private colleges and providers. Often these are simply not an option for people with intellectual disabilities due to the cost, entry level of the course and the nonexistent disability support. Further to this without TAFE as an option the already clear emphasis on business services as the only viable employment option.

In the longer term, the impacts of such changes are more profound and will affect people's entire quality of life. TAFE NSW has long been a lead educator for people with intellectual disabilities and for many students "courses have facilitated articulation to higher level programs where appropriate for individuals or transition to the workforce"(Teacher Consultant at the SWSI TAFE 2009). Education is a key factor in people being able to gain the skills and knowledge to gain open employment, an adequate wage and the entitlements that they require to have a decent quality of life.

Many of NSW CID members have accessed TAFE NSW and completed courses. The general view of members is that without having support from a teacher consultant it would have not been possible to pursue their studies successfully. Members received additional time to review lectures, had assistance with planning assessments and support to use TAFE facilities such as computers and the library.

NSW CID considers it is essential that access to education remains available for people with intellectual disability. Educational pathways need to exist that are accessible, adequately funded, flexible for the learners need and that have realistic allowances for support.

International Research

NZ currently is undertaking a review of their education system with relation to special needs students. Whilst this is not due for completion till mid March 2010, it is anticipated that the review would be able to highlight some of the progress and challenges that New Zealand has encountered whilst attempting to create a more inclusive education system. More information regarding the enquiry is able to be found at the link provided below:

<http://www.minedu.govt.nz/theMinistry/Consultation/ReviewOfSpecialEducation/DiscussionDocument2010.aspx>

New South Wales education also can also benefit from the lessons learnt in Canadian school systems. Longitudinal research and program reviews have indicated that making inclusive education a reality needs “leadership, policy clarity and additional resources to provide systemic supports”. (Porte 2008:65).

Concluding Remarks

NSW CID will continue to work together with people with intellectual disabilities, families, the community, educators, other peak bodies and the government to make inclusive education a reality.

NSW CID believes that much can be improved within the current education system, many of which are reasonable recommendations or processes that can become the foundation for an entirely inclusive model in the future.

NSW CID is committed to actively advocating for a more inclusive school practices that allow all students to reach their learning potential and become valued members of their community.

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