

PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES WA INC.

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Submission for the Review of Base Funding for Higher Education in Australia

Q2.3 Is there a system of higher education funding in another country that would be a useful benchmark model to inform Australia's review of base funding?

Q3.8 What other factors, if any, should be taken into account in determining base funding for teaching and learning in higher education?

People with Disabilities Western Australia Inc. (PWdWA) is a peak disability organisation representing the rights and needs of all Western Australians with a disability.

PWdWA supports the Government's equity agenda, to increase access and participation for students from disadvantaged groups. Though, PWdWA is concerned with inconsistencies in the allocation of funds to assist higher education students with disabilities and recognises that there may be areas where funding should be allocated to the individual and not to the education provider.

Currently, in accordance with the *Higher Education Support Act 2003*, students with disabilities attending private higher education institutions (Table B providers) are not eligible for funds through the Government's Higher Education Disability Support Program.

The Higher Education Disability Support Program includes three components:

1. Additional Support for Students with Disabilities (ASSD)
2. Performance-based Disability Support Funding
3. The Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET)

In accordance with the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the Disability Standards for Education 2005, people with disabilities should have the right to enrol and participate in education 'on the same basis' as people without disabilities. Unfortunately, the current allocation of higher education support funds may lead to additional barriers for people with disabilities to enrol and participate in higher education. PWdWA promotes freedom of choice and respects that students may wish to attend a private institute of higher education for a number of reasons, including religious affiliation, location and choice of course.

PWdWA recommends that the Australian Government considers funding models adopted by other countries in determining the level of funding that would be appropriate to meet the needs of higher education students with disabilities. For example, students in receipt of the UK's Disabled Students' Allowance (DSA) between 2010-2011 are eligible for an annual basic allowance of up to £1725 [approx. \$2691], £20520 [approx. \$32011] for non-medical help for the academic year (e.g., note-takers and specialist academic tutors), and £5160 [approx. \$8050] for equipment for their period of study [e.g., screen readers and hearing loops].

In accordance with the Productivity Commission's draft report on Disability Care and Support Feb 2011, PWdWA recommends that the Government adopts a 'consumer choice model' when allocating funds for Higher Education Disability Support programs. Within this model, students with disabilities would have more control over how their disability support funding is spent. They may choose to fully self-direct their funding or seek the assistance of a disability support officer who could assist them in putting together a support package. A 'consumer choice model' would also allow students to select services from different providers or equipment manufacturers that best suits their needs.

Lastly, PWdWA recommends that higher education base funding accounts for the ongoing training and professional development of higher education staff, and students, in disability awareness and the Disability Standards for Education.

In conclusion, PWdWA recommends that the Review Panel should consider:

- 1) the methods used to allocate funds;
- 2) the levels of funding necessary to meet students' needs;
- 3) the eligibility criteria for funded programs such as the Higher Education Disability Support Program; and,
- 4) the costs involved in training staff and students in disability awareness.

PWdWA acknowledges that we have only touched upon a small number of issues in our submission. We look forward to reading other submissions for the Review and the panel's report to the Australian Government in October 2011.

Yours faithfully

People with Disabilities (WA) Inc.

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