

POSITION STATEMENT

TITLE: ACCESS TO EDUCATION

ISSUE:

Education (from pre-school right through to post-secondary) sets people up for life. A good education leads to better opportunities when it is complete. In today's competitive climate, tertiary education is almost a prerequisite to stable employment. It is therefore vital that Deaf and hearing impaired (or hard of hearing) students (including those with unilateral or conductive losses) of all ages receive the best education possible, at all stages of their education. This includes those with additional learning needs (e.g. those who are DeafBlind). Communication in the classroom is essential for quality education, and Deaf and hearing impaired students face many communication challenges in classroom situations. These are addressed in a separate Deafness Forum Position Statement "Communication Access in Education Facilities". The level of communication access support needed by any student who has a hearing impairment varies with the level of impairment.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) makes it illegal to discriminate against people with disabilities in terms of access to education. DDA Standards on Education became law during June 2005. The Standards clarify the obligations of education services providers under the DDA. Despite the legislation, there is considerable discrimination in respect of access to education for people who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment.

The DDA Standards address:

- enrolment
- participation
- curriculum development, accreditation and delivery
- student support services
- elimination of harassment and victimisation

Deafness Forum has made available (via its Website) a guide to what the DDA Standards mean for students who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment.

It is important that all education providers recognise that the DDA and the Standards apply to students who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment (including those with a unilateral or conductive hearing loss).

All Deaf and hearing impaired students have the same right as hearing students to:

- choice of educational institution
- inclusion in decisions surrounding support services
- open communication with staff

The needs of students' families must be taken into consideration. No student or family should have to move residence to access the type of education required. For Deaf students, there is a need for schools that specifically cater for them as well as for their inclusion in regular schools. Social inclusion and life skills must be addressed in the context of education.

There are also significant issues relating to:

- the adequacy of support from hearing aid suppliers and repairers
- the supply of qualified Auslan interpreters and note-takers
- the awareness/education of staff, peers and school communities
- the need to include information specifically related to students who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment
- the potential use of existing and new technologies
- rural and remote areas
- professional development of mainstream teachers
- transition from primary to secondary schools, to tertiary education, and to work
- the relationships between secondary education institutions, the TAFE sector, and work experience employers
- access to positive role models
- visiting teachers of the deaf (including the personal development of those teachers)
- student support services
- how bilingualism and biculturalism are provided in the classroom
- the total number of support hours provided to each student
- open communication between parents and teacher, parents and education providers, and education providers and the Auslan-using Deaf community
- access to examinations and other assessment processes

Some methods of facilitating open communication are:

- regular meetings between parents and teachers (and interpreters) to discuss current classroom topics and agree upon appropriate lexicon choices. As Auslan has various dialect forms throughout Australia, it is important that the right regional dialect be used when Auslan-using parents or others are involved in meetings.
- ensuring parents have knowledge of new and current classroom lexicon.
- ensuring interpreters (and teachers) are aware of any home and name signs that an Auslan-using student develops. Where the language used in the education provider setting is different to the discourse form used in the home, interpreters need to be aware of unfamiliar signs that may crop up.

An Individual Education Plan (IEP) for any student should include detailed information regarding the type of support required and the plan to provide that support. Ideally, the IEP should also clearly identify the number of support hours to be provided. That may not be possible in some States or Territories, where the requirements for the process for development of an IEP have very specific

parameters. Parents and students should discuss this with the Principals or Chief Executives of education providers.

POSITION:

That all education providers (public and private), from pre-school right through to post-secondary, must meet all requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act and the DDA Standards on Education in respect of students who are Deaf or have a hearing impairment (or hard of hearing), including those with additional learning needs (such as those who are DeafBlind). In particular, no education provider shall refuse enrolment of a student just because he or she is Deaf or has a hearing impairment. As required by the student, the following shall be provided:

1. information about teaching methodologies, in a non-biased format
2. full access, participation and inclusion of students in curricula/extra curricula activities, including life skill and socialisation activities
3. access to positive role models
4. access to career planning
5. equitable access to examinations and other assessment processes
6. online and/or video conferencing facilities to enable access to all needed support, where such support is not directly available
7. other appropriate technology and forms of support, including qualified note-takers where needed and requested
8. communication access (as detailed in the separate Deafness Forum position statement "Communication Access in Education Facilities")

That each State and Territory shall have a specific policy regarding harassment and victimisation prevention, relating to the education of students who are Deaf or hearing impaired, and each education provider shall have an adequate structure to ensure compliance with that policy.

That the Commonwealth, State and Territory governments shall fund strategies and methods for providing support to rural and remote areas, particularly in the area of video conferencing and online facilities.

COSTS OF POSITION:

Since the position statement is essentially about education providers meeting their existing obligations under the DDA, there should be no new costs involved. Education providers will, however, incur costs to the extent that they currently are not meeting their DDA obligations and, therefore, need to do so.

RESEARCH BASIS:

No particular research has been undertaken, since the position statement is essentially about meeting existing DDA obligations. Statements made in the discussion of the issue are based on available knowledge and advice from members of the Deafness Forum working in various relevant professions.



APPROVED: Board, 6 February 2006.

REVIEWED: No review yet undertaken.

DATE OF NEXT SCHEDULED REVIEW: No review yet scheduled.