

Country Reports

AUSTRALIA

Five Year Theme: “Advancement of Education to Meet the Special Needs of Individuals ~ Towards Realization of Principle of Equity and Social Cohesion ~”.

2006 Basic Theme: “Collaboration Based on Partnership among Related Fields for Appropriate Service Provision to Individuals”

The Australian Perspective

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A significant feature of the Australian system of education services to students with disability is the wide range of options available that enable flexible responses to students’ various needs. This is a product of the structure of the Australian system. Responsibility for school education in Australia is decentralised. Under the Australian Constitution, the eight States and Territories have primary responsibility for the funding and delivery of school education. In Australia, schooling is delivered by three sectors: government, Catholic and independent across each State and Territory. States and Territories also have primary responsibility for the funding and delivery of vocational education and training. The Australian Government provides the majority of public funding for universities, while the institutions themselves are responsible for ensuring that higher education is accessible to people from all equity groups, including students with disability, and ensuring that these students receive quality higher education.

To support the efforts of the eight States and Territories and educational institutions, the Australian Government provides significant financial assistance, including funding for specific programmes to assist students with disability. Other Australian Government and State and Territory government agencies with responsibility for health and family and community services also have important roles in relation to students with disability.

Education sectors of the States and Territories all have different cultures based upon their own history, legislation, policies and practices. There is variation across the States and Territories in the services provided for students with disability by education authorities and by other relevant government authorities, such as health, community and disability services.

All education authorities – both government and non-government – provide special and integration programmes in primary, secondary or special school settings. Some education authorities provide additional services in collaboration with other government agencies such as early intervention; post-school transitions; speech therapy; occupational therapy and social work. The States and Territories have generally established formal administrative structures to facilitate the links between government agencies.

To assist in service provision across levels of government, collaborative policy making and advisory structures have been established at a national level. The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs includes the Australian Government Minister for Education, Science and Training and all State and Territory education and training ministers. This Ministerial Council facilitates national collaboration on education. The National Disability Administrators is a group which includes the Australian Government Minister responsible for disability and all State and Territory ministers with responsibility for disability and the Group facilitates collaboration on disability services.

In Australia, there is also collaboration between the government sector and organisations, such as charities and peak bodies, representing particular stakeholder and provider groups. For example, the Australian Government provides funding to non-government support centres. A non-government centre is a not for profit organisation such as a preschool, early intervention centre, charity or community or religious organisation that provides a variety of services which assist children with disability. The Australian Government funding for non-government centres is targeted to support learning and educational development opportunities for children with disabilities who are below school age to prepare them for integration into regular pre-schools or schools; assist school-aged children with severe disabilities by improving their access to educational programmes; and to assist children with disabilities in residential care.

Wider social supports which assist students with disability to access education are also provided by the Australian Government and States and Territories. The Australian Government provides income support to financially support students, including students with disability, during their studies, while the Australian Government and the States and Territories work together to provide other services such as accommodation support, advocacy and technical support services.