

AUSTRALIAN BLINDNESS FORUM

POLICY ON EDUCATION FOR PEOPLE WHO ARE BLIND OR VISION IMPAIRED

**August 2017**

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The Australian Blindness Forum (ABF) was formed in 1992 and is funded only by its members. ABF is an Australian public company limited by guarantee and governed by a Board of Directors. ABF is the peak body representing blindness, low vision and rehabilitation in the blindness sector. As Australia’s representative to the World Blind Union, the ABF has strong connections with the international blind and vision impaired community.

Members of the ABF, reflecting the Australian Government’s policy on social inclusion, are committed to assisting people who are blind or vision impaired to become and remain independent, valued and active members of the community.

**ABF Goals**

**Goal 1** Encourage exchange of information between ABF Members and Associates and key stakeholders.

**Goal 2** Participate in government policy development and law reform and advocate for people who are blind or vision impaired.

**Goal 3** Enable blindness sector representation both nationally and internationally.

**Goal 4** Encourage and promote the development and equity of the level of services throughout Australasia.

**Goal 5** Enable Australia to facilitate its membership of the World Blind Union.

**Goal 6** Increase membership of ABF and encourage full membership.

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###### Web: <http://www.australianblindnessforum.org.au> BACKGROUND TO THE POLICY

**Purpose**

To overcome the barriers faced by children and young people who are blind or vision impaired in developing the lifeskills[[1]](#footnote-1) needed to become and remain an integral part of the Australian community.

**Target population**

It is estimated that there are approximately 500,000 Australians who are vision impaired including 50,000 who are blind, 4,000 of whom have a form of deafblindness. The total is estimated to increase to nearly 800,000 by 2024.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Based on the number of students receiving support due to their disability, it is estimated that there are in excess of 3,000 students of school age who are blind or vision impaired[[3]](#footnote-3), of whom 70% are likely to have additional disabilities.

**Environment**

ABF strongly supports the view that every person in Australia has the fundamental right to live as independently as possible within the community.

**DISABILITY STANDARDS FOR EDUCATION 2005**

In 2005, the Government introduced the Disability Standards for Education 2005[[4]](#footnote-4). The Government says the Standards ‘clarify the obligations of education and training providers and seek to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students’.

The Standards were formulated under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and came into effect in August 2005.

The Standards are required to be reviewed every five years and, as such, the Standards were reviewed in 2010 and 2015. The 2015 Review stated that progress had been made since the 2010 Review in raising awareness of the Standards with educators through various initiatives and resources.

The Government issued an initial response to the 2015 Review in December 2015[[5]](#footnote-5) stating:

Whilst there has been significant improvement in the accessibility and use of the Standards since 2010, it is evident that further effort and resources are still required in order to support the use, application and interpretation of the Standards in practice. The recommendations from the 2015 Review outline key areas for improvement across all levels of education to better improve knowledge of and implementation of the Standards…The Standards were designed to clarify the rights of students with disability and obligations of education providers under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*. Whilst progress has been made since 2010 in educator awareness and understanding, further work is required to ensure that students, parents and carers are fully informed and aware of their rights.

A formal and final Australian Government response to the 2015 Review has not yet been provided to outline the actions it will take to implement the recommendations of the 2015 Review.

ABF looks forward to a final response from Government and for the recommendations in the 2015 Review being implemented to ensure all students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as other students. In particular, it is imperative that students with disability can access information and materials in their format of their choice and with adaptive technology and software provided.

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1. Children who are blind or vision impaired need additional support and opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills across eight areas: self-care; organisational skills; time management; decision making; pre-vocational and career skills; advocacy; awareness of and access to community resources; appropriate home-based leisure activities (see Expanded Core Curriculum, American Foundation for the Blind, <http://www.afb.org/Section.asp?SectionID=44&TopicID=189&SubTopicID=4> and National Agenda for Education of Children and Youths with Visual Impairments, Including Those with Multiple Disabilities, <http://www.tsbvi.edu/agenda/corecurric.htm> ) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Clear Insight, The Economic Impact and Cost of Vision Loss in Australia, an Overview,* Eye Research Australia and Access Economics, 2004 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Children with Disabilities in Australia*,Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2004 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/16354> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. <https://docs.education.gov.au/node/38931> [↑](#footnote-ref-5)