Baird Government response to Vision Australia's 2015 NSW Election Priorities

# Education

The Department of Education and Communities takes a coordinated approach to the provision of personalised learning and support for students with disability, including students who are blind or have low vision, through an extensive range of specialist services and programs.

Students are supported in regular classes, with additional assistance from the Integration Funding Support Program and in specialist support classes. Specialist staff are also available, including advisors with expertise in education for students with disability as well as 135 specialist teachers with specific expertise in vision impairment. The type of personalised support provided reflects the assessed individual needs of the student and may include adjustments to learning programs, provision of Braille or large print materials, additional support in the classroom from a specialist teacher with expertise in vision impairment or from a school learning support officer, and provision of specialist technology for the student.

The Department offers a wide range of professional learning that builds teachers' knowledge and skills in recognising and responding to the learning and support needs of the full range of students with disability. Regular courses in Braille are delivered in different locations across the state.

School principals determine the use of resources to support the professional learning required for their teachers, in line with the education reform Local Schools, Local Decisions. Senior officers in the Department meet regularly with an extensive range of professionals and stakeholders in education and support for students with disability, including Vision Australia.

The Baird Government's Smart and Skilled reforms includes significant support for students with special needs including generous fee exemptions and concessions and loading to providers to fund additional support needs.

The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal (IPART) provided advice to the Government on Smart and Skilled prices and fees following consultation with industry and the community. The independent NSW Skills Board considered this advice and recommended some important changes to ensure students will not be unduly disadvantaged.

From January 2015, under Smart and Skilled, training providers will receive a 15% loading on top of the price for the qualification to help meet the learning needs of students with a disability. Price loadings are not intended to be the sole source of funding for students with high cost needs.

TAFE NSW and Adult and Community Education (ACE) will receive additional Community Service Obligation funding to provide support services, specialist staff and higher equipment costs across all areas of disability services under Smart and Skilled to make reasonable adjustments for students with special needs to enable access to training.

The Smart and Skilled Operating Guidelines require providers to take all reasonable efforts to make adjustments to support the needs of disadvantaged learners, including those with a disability. Under the Operating Guidelines, providers will also need to inform such students how they will plan, deliver and assess training to take their needs into account.

Where a Smart and Skilled provider does not have sufficient resources to provide the necessary support for a special needs learner, then it needs to either make adjustments to accommodate the student's needs or assist the student to locate another provider which offers government subsidised training and has the necessary resources.

TAFE NSW is committed to supporting disadvantaged learners, including people with a disability, as set out in the Technical and Further Education Commission Act 1990 and expressed in the Statement of Owner Expectations. TAFE NSW takes all reasonable steps to support access to training for people with a disability, as required under the Disability Discrimination Act, 1992 and the Disability Standards for Education, 2005.

To help students with a disability gain the education and skills they need to participate fully in the workforce and community life, a wide range of support based on individual needs is provided at TAFE NSW. Eligible students with a disability are also entitled to fee concessions and exemptions for government subsidised training at TAFE NSW.

Students with a disability studying at TAFE are supported by an individual learning plan which identifies the support services they can access. Support for students who are blind or have low vision may include adaptive equipment or technology such as large print software programs, micro recorders and screen readers (enables a person to hear, review and edit text typed on a computer screen) as well as class support.

The Statement in Learner Support was previously used by TAFE for students who were enrolled in another qualification and required language, literacy, numeracy and disability support.

In 2014, the national Foundation Skills Training Package was introduced and includes a number of units of competency for the areas of language, literacy and numeracy support. TAFE NSW now uses units from the Foundation Skills Training Package to develop the TAFE NSW Statement of Attainment in Foundation Skills Support to replace the language, literacy and numeracy support components of the TAFE Statement in Learner Support.

# Employment

The Baird Government is committed to increasing participation of people with disability in employment or further education.

The 2014/15 NSW Budget announced a reshaping of the Payroll Tax Rebate Scheme with $6 million to increase employment opportunities for people with disability.

The Employment Enablement Strategy has two main focuses:

1. Providing over 200 Individualised funding packages to support adults with intellectual disability to develop the skills and confidence needed to move into employment. On the job training will also be offered for people who are gain a job, and
2. To build the capacity of businesses to employ people with disability.

## Disability Enterprise Procurement Program

In 2011, the NSW Government engaged National Disability Services to maintain a register of disability organisations and to act as contract manager, supporting public sector agencies to engage with the most suitable disability organisation to meet their procurement needs. This program is known as the Disability Enterprise Procurement Program.

The Disability Enterprise Procurement Program has helped 43 disability employment organisations gain work. A total of 469 people with disability have been employed in providing goods and services to the NSW Government.

## Transition to Work

Transition to Work is a two year program designed to support recent school leavers with moderate to high needs to develop skills necessary for employment and/or further education. In 2013/14, approximately 2,319 participants were funded in the Transition to Work program. The 2014 Transition to Work outcome figures report that 422 or 55.7% of participants who began their program in 2012 achieved employment or further education. In 2014/15 it is forecasted that Transition to Work will deliver an estimated 2,429 places.

## Transition Support Program

The Transition Support Project is a joint partnership between the NSW Government and the non-government sector aimed at ensuring that secondary school students with disability are better assisted to decide what they want to do when they finish school so they enter a post school environment with the necessary skills and confidence. It is anticipated that approximately 700 students will be assisted over five years.

# Getting around

The Baird Government wants to make travel for customers with a disability as easy as possible, and recently announced a package of improvements for customers with a disability, including a new electronic payment system for taxis.

The NSW Government is now developing a new electronic payment system for customers using the Taxi Transport Subsidy Scheme, replacing the out-dated paper dockets currently used. Transport for NSW will continue work closely with stakeholders, including customers, drivers and the taxi industry as this project progresses.

In addition, disability training for taxi drivers will be improved, and more wheelchair accessible taxis will be encouraged. The government is also assessing ways to make services more affordable, including whether the taxi transport subsidy can be increased.

# Access to information

The Baird Government commends Vision Australia for publishing free resources to help mainstream and community organisations support young children who have a visual impairment and their families.

In 2014 the Baird Government developed and distributed the NSW Government Agency Guide for Effective Communication for People with a Sensory Disability to support staff in communicating with the public and their colleagues.

The NSW Government's Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care's website conforms to the World Wide Web Consortium's Web Content Accessibility Guidelines version 2. All documents placed on the website are uploaded as accessible PDFs and a number of ADHC documents are available in large print or Braille.

# Supporting blindness and low vision service continuity in NSW

The Baird Government commends Vision Australia for completing a NSW Government funded project to ensure that its Children's Services division and clients will be well prepared

for the transition to the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The Baird Government is proud to have partnered with Vision Australia to deliver this project.

These reforms, to be implemented across the organisation, include streaming and packaging services so services meet family needs, with a strong focus on transitions including starting child care or leaving school, piloting family packages which include mainstream and community provider options and training staff in family-centred approaches to service provision.

Disability service providers delivering specialist services to people who are blind or have low vision are able to access sector capacity building initiatives such as the Industry Development Fund to support their organisations transition to the NDIS.

Vision Australia have advised that 70% of their clientele are aged 65 and older. Under the National Health Reform Agreement, the Commonwealth Government has responsibility for the funding of support to people 65 years and over, including those being supported in Residential Aged Care or through a Home Care Package.

Vision Australia are encouraged to raise with the Commonwealth Government their concerns in relation to the capacity of aged care supports meeting the needs of people aged over 65 who are blind or have low vision.

# Accessible Voting through iVote

## iVote and Local Government Elections

The Baird Government acknowledges the potential benefits of extending the availability of technology assisted voting to electors for Local Government elections to promote greater voter participation.

In October 2014 in a response to a report on the 2012 Local Government Elections by the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters, the Baird Government committed to exploring the feasibility of making iVote available for use at the 2020 Local Government elections. The Office of Local Government is currently considering this proposal and how it should be assessed.

## Promoting iVote to the AEC

The Baird Government acknowledges that Vision Australia is passionate about the extension of the iVote system to Commonwealth Parliament and Senate elections, and has raised it in their submissions to the Commonwealth's Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters.

The Baird Government would be happy to engage with the NSW Electoral Commission on their views as to the appropriateness of an extension, or offer of services to the AEC in regards to iVote.