



Queensland Catholic Education Commission

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National Disability Strategy – Stage 2 Consultations

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Introduction

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) provides this submission on the *National Disability Strategy – Stage 2 Consultations*, to inform the *National Disability Strategy 2020-2030*.

QCEC is the peak strategic body with state-wide responsibilities for Catholic schooling in Queensland. This submission is provided on behalf of the five Diocesan Catholic school authorities and 17 Religious Institutes and other incorporated bodies which, between them, operate a total of 307 Catholic schools that educate more than 149,000 students in Queensland.

Background

A core expectation of the current [National Disability Strategy 2010 – 2020](#) was to establish a high-level policy framework to give coherence to, and guide government activity across mainstream and disability-specific areas of public policy. It is the main way that Australia implements the [United Nation Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#).

Under the current NDS, each level of government has roles and responsibilities across the range of policies and programs that impact on people with disability, their families, and carers. The Strategy has sought to create a more cohesive approach across all governments. Consultation for the new NDS highlights the move towards strengthening accountability and measuring outcomes of the strategy within the government and non-government sectors across the six outcome areas. These six outcome areas are – *personal and community support; inclusive and accessible communities; rights, protection, justice and legislation; learning and skills; health and wellbeing; and economic security*.

The review of the current NDS and an outcome of the Stage 1 Consultations indicates the six outcome areas will be retained. The new strategy will include an Outcomes Framework as a mechanism to hold governments and service providers to account for the outcomes of programs and services and to improve cooperation between government and non-government entities. QCEC welcomes the proposal in the new strategy to have an increased focus on accountability and implementation of policies and programs to improve outcomes for people with disability.

Queensland Catholic School Authorities were invited to provide feedback on the government's proposal for the next Strategy, as set out in the [National Disability Strategy position paper](#), as part of the Stage 2 consultations. This feedback has informed the QCEC submission.

1. Vision and Outcome Areas

The proposed vision is:

An inclusive Australian society that enables people with disability to fulfil their potential as equal members of the community.

There are six outcome areas in the current strategy, proposed to continue in the new Strategy.

QCEC looks forward to the opportunity to participate in the consultation on a draft Outcomes Framework which is expected to occur through a separate public submission process.

Question 1

Do you have any comments on the vision and outcome areas being proposed for the new National Disability Strategy?

Can you see any specific issues within the outcome areas that you think need a particular focus in the next Strategy?

The Queensland Catholic Education Commission believes that the vision and outcome areas proposed in the new strategy are broad and comprehensive, addressing the areas of need of people with disability. It is on this basis that we offer our support for the vision and outcome areas.

QCEC also supports the replacement of 'citizen' with 'members of the community'. Building a community that supports all people, not just citizens, aligns with our Catholic ethos of a welcoming inclusive community that enables all members to live their best life.

2. Guiding Principles

Guiding principles will guide governments and non-government agencies to design and deliver policies and programs. The proposed guiding principles are well aligned with the Catholic ethos.

Question 2

What do you think about the guiding principles proposed here?

Are there other principles that would help ensure policies and programs are right for people with disability, their family and carers? What information or guidance could help organisations to use and adhere to these principles?

QCEC supports the proposed additional principles, however, the test of these principles will be measured by how well they are adhered to and how they influence and shape policy and practice. QCEC is very supportive of the engagement of people with lived experience of disability and their families/ carers to ensure policies and programs are right for people with disability. At times, there seems to be a gap between these principles and the lived experiences of people with disability. It will be critical for the new strategy to enable proactive approaches to implement these principles and with an increased focus on accountability, be clear about what action will be taken if these principles are not followed.

The new strategy must include ways to make sure different types of organisations and individuals adhere to the guiding principles, including ensuring they understand and can effectively use the principles. This could be done through:

- Training and information sharing by people with disability as they have lived experience
- Providing clear information about what each principle means
- Sharing case studies of how organisations or programs are applying the principles in action
- A checklist of steps organisations could take to put the principles into action.

3. A stronger focus on community attitudes

In the first stage of consultations, people with disability said one of the biggest barriers they face in fully participating in society is community attitudes.

QCEC values opportunities that foster attitudinal change across Australian communities to harness the rich contribution people with disability make to our society.

Question 3

What is your view on the proposal for the new Strategy to have a stronger emphasis on improving community attitudes across all outcome areas?

QCEC supports a stronger emphasis on improving community attitudes across all outcome areas, but particularly in the outcome area of *learning and skills*. In practical terms, Catholic School Authorities are seeking locally managed opportunities to collaborate with government and other non-government agencies to build relationships that can shape positive disability-inclusive attitudes within and across the community. Having a lead agency to facilitate collaborative enterprises would be welcomed. The emphasis on improving community attitudes is an important element of this strategy which requires practical ideas as well as aspirational intent.

4. Clearly describing roles and responsibilities

All Australians have a role to play in achieving an inclusive Australian community. The new Strategy will strengthen accountability by proposing to clearly describe the roles and responsibilities of government and non-government organisations.

Question 4

How do you think that clearly outlining what each government is responsible for could make it easier for people with disability to access the supports and services they need?

To achieve changed outcomes for people with disability and community attitudes towards people with a disability a coordinated approach at all levels of government and the community sector is necessary. Having clarity about agency (government and non-government) roles and responsibilities to reduce the likelihood of misunderstandings and miscommunication, which can have a negative impact on opportunities and therefore life outcomes for people with disability, is required. Currently, there is some community confusion about how to access the multiple sources of resources (including funding) that can be used to support people with disability. Furthermore, the roles and responsibilities of agencies administering these programs is not always clear, which reduces participation for people with disability. For example, the lack of clarity between what services and supports should be provided through the NDIS or from the school; as well as the different ways sectors manage and distribute disability funding.

More streamlined and transparent service arrangements would make it easier to track and monitor the outcomes of the programs and the impact for people with disability. At times, the administrative burden placed on people with disability to identify and access services is restrictive and further marginalises some people. For example, the necessity to pay for medical specialist appointments to update documentation when there is already evidence of specific services in place to support a person with a disability. QCEC is supportive of the intention to improve clarity about roles and responsibilities of agencies and service providers; additionally it is recommended that this is done in a range of formats that ensures access to all people with disability and their families/carers, as well as agencies and service providers.

Question 5

How do you think the Strategy should represent the role that the non-government sector plays in improving outcomes for people with disability?

Suggest a way the Strategy could better guide non-government organisations to improve inclusion and equity for people with disability. This could include their role in communities, the workplace, or as part of delivering services.

Through collaborative engagement with non-government organisations there are opportunities to establish partnerships that acknowledge and build on the contribution these organisations make to quality service delivery and the broader economy. This will help to ensure people with disability do not fall through the gaps between the government and non-government sectors and build confidence to partner with other organisations.

5. Reporting

Reporting is an important part of the Strategy's goal of strengthening accountability. QCEC recognises the value of moving away from periodic reports to a regular reporting cycle.

Question 6

What kind of information on the Strategy's progress should governments make available to the public and how often should this information be made available?

What type of reporting would help you know whether the lives of people with disability in Australia are improving? How often should reporting be done?

In principle, QCEC is supportive of a bi-annual reporting cycle. Educational organisations already have established reporting schedules to government, therefore, it is recommended that consideration be given to what is already in place to determine how this could be firstly maximised for any additional reporting, and secondly, how this reporting benefits the broader community. QCEC would be seeking an understanding of how the report data will be used to inform/improve outcomes for students with disability and their families/carers.

Consideration will need to be given to ensure that people with disability, their parents/carers, and professionals working with people with a disability have a voice in this process. It will also be important to ensure that non-government agencies have an opportunity to inform the workflow of bi-annual reporting so that the Strategy is seen as an opportunity to lift Australian communities rather than a framework driven by reporting requirements that do not lead to meaningful change for people with disability or benefit the broader community.

6. Targeted Action Plans to drive implementation

The proposal for the new Strategy to have an Outcomes Framework and subsequent evaluations to provide a more coordinated and cohesive approach to measuring the effectiveness of programs people with disability use is welcomed.

QCEC understands the intent of the Targeted Action Plan is for governments to work with each other and the non-government sector on a particular topic for a certain period of time, to make the improvements needed. The goal of the Targeted Action Plan is to improve the outcomes of people with disability and therefore needs person-centred planning.

Question 7

What do you think of the proposal to have Targeted Action Plans that focus on making improvements in specific areas within a defined period of time (for example within one, two or three years)?

In responding to this question, you might like to think about specific topics, areas or strategies you think Targeted Action Plans should focus on.

In principle, a targeted approach to improving the outcomes of people with disability is supported. However, further consultation would be required to determine:

- Which focus areas or sectors the Targeted Action Plan would apply to.
- What the Targeted Action Plan would look like and what flexibility would be included to enable actions to be responsive to local needs but still hold organisations accountable.
- How people with disability, their parents/carers, government and non-government entities contribute to the development of the plan.

QCEC suggests an area for consideration in a Targeted Action Plan is the intersection of services at key life stages and transitions where it is likely multiple services need to have a coordinated approach. For example, commencing school, school to employment, tertiary education to employment. Feedback from our Catholic School Authorities indicates that families and schools often have difficulties with engaging sustained long-term services that address the specific needs of students with disability and their families/carers at these junctures, despite, in some cases, the student having a NDIS plan.

Some of the reasons provided for these difficulties include:

- there may be limited service options where the student resides,
- the administrative burden on the family can be overwhelming,
- the relationship of the service provider with the person with the disability (and their family/carer) and the school needs to be established to have successful outcomes but this can take time and often funding runs out and/or the workers move on.

Effective transitioning between life stages/junctures facilitates success with the next stage. Success builds success, this is critical for all people, but even more so for people with disability to have full and productive life.

7. Engagement with people with disability

The first stage of consultation confirmed that people with disability expect to be more involved in disability policy development and program design.

The discussion paper proposed to introduce an Engagement Plan. A potential benefit of an Engagement Plan that states how governments will ensure people with disability can lead and shape disability policies, programs and services would be a welcome addition to the NDS. An Engagement Plan has the potential to provide a clear roadmap for organisations, such as QCEC, to support governments to ensure people with disability bring their voice to shaping policy and programs.

Question 8

How could the proposed Engagement Plan ensure people with disability, and the disability community, are involved in delivering and monitoring the next Strategy?

Provide advice about specific strategies or actions that could go into an engagement plan so that people with disability have more say in how the Strategy is monitored and delivered.

Representation and active decision making of people with lived experience of disability and their parents/carers in the development of the strategy is vital to ensuring that funding and well-meaning policy delivers actual benefits for people with disability. Opportunities such as the NDIS planning sessions for people with disability and their families/carers in which people with disability led the process were well received and valued. This process may provide a blueprint for coordinating something similar at a national level to ensure that regardless of where people live, they have the opportunity to actively engage in all aspects and intentions of the strategy.

8. Additional information

Question 9

Is there anything else you would like to share about the ideas and proposals in the position paper?

QCEC values the opportunity to be collaboratively involved in the consultation process with other non-government educational providers. There is alignment of the six outcome areas with the Catholic ethos, which strives for people with disability to have meaningful and engaged lives within the communities in which they live. Education (*learning and skills*) has a critical role in enabling all members of the community, including people with disability, to contribute to the broader economic good of all people and in building a social community.

Some Queensland Catholic School Authorities have also suggested that a visual scaffold (like a map or flowchart) would have been a useful tool to be able to visualise how the legislation, various disability policies and the programs all work together.

Should you wish to discuss any aspect of this response further, please contact Jeanine Gallagher, Senior Education Officer at jeanineg@qcec.catholic.edu.au.

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