



Submission made by
Julia Farr Association's Youth Group

The Higher Education Base Fund Review

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The Julia Farr Youth Group wishes to make a submission on the Discussion Paper 'The Higher Education Base Funding Review'.

We acknowledge that the material we have submitted in this document does not necessarily match directly to the questions that have been posed in the DEEWR discussion paper. However, given Australia's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, we have focused on a range of critical issues that we think have a firm connection to higher education funding, and which will help ensure that people living with disability get a fair go in higher education.

The Julia Farr Youth Group was established in 2008 and are a young group of adults living with disability from diverse backgrounds who are enthusiastic about disability youth issues. The Youth Group meets monthly and discusses issues which are important to them and devises strategies to change thoughts and lives. It is an opportunity for young people living with disability to voice their concerns and to take action for change. One such area of concern for the youth group is access to higher education.

The Julia Farr Youth Group supports the Government's equity agenda of increasing access and participation among students from disadvantaged groups. The Youth Group proposes the following strategies to achieve this agenda with a focus on disability:

- **Recommendation 1. Individualised (Self-directed) Funding**

The Julia Farr Youth Group recommends the introduction of Individualised (Self-directed) Funding for students living with disability. Individualised Funding is public funding that is allocated to the individual based on his/her unique strengths and needs and placed under the control of the individual to enable him/her to live in the community as a full citizen¹. Individualised Funding is used in a range of formats in Australia and overseas and has proved successful. Its introduction in higher education would allow students to access personalised support that would provide the most beneficial assistance towards their higher education. Current funding methodologies in education don't help this to happen. The introduction of Individualised Funding would allow students to plan for their education and to purchase equipment or support hours individually tailored to their needs.

¹ Dowson and Salisbury (1999) http://www.communitylivingbc.ca/what_we_do/innovation/pdf/IF_Policy_Implementation_issues.pdf, Individualized Funding: Emerging Policy Issues, viewed 18th March 2011, pg. 4.

- **Recommendation 2. Transition Programs**

The Julia Farr Youth Group recommends improved transition from high school to higher education and believes that there is insufficient capacity, absence even, in schools around planning for the future. The Youth Group supports the concept that high schools and higher education providers should work jointly on this and collaborate on ways to support students living with disability and students from disadvantaged groups to access higher education. For example a study in 2002 involving 283 families of young people with intellectual disability aged between 13 and 25 found that a fifth of the young people who had completed secondary education did not have a transition plan. For those who did possess plans, the issues covered differed from what the families and youth regarded to be of prime importance². The Youth Group urges education providers to listen to students living with disability as the leap from high school to higher education can be a difficult one. Transition programs can assist to bridge the gap between high school and higher education, supporting students to remain in higher education and be successful.

- **Recommendation 3. Developed Relationships with Employment Agencies**

The Julia Farr Youth Group recommends that the transition from higher education to employment be strengthened and that higher education providers assist with this move. A report from New Zealand's 2006 Disability Survey indicated that whilst having a post-school qualification diminished the probability of unemployment considerably, those persons living with disability that attained tertiary level qualifications shared the same likelihood of securing employment as their non-disabled peers without such qualifications³. The Youth Group feel that the findings of this report from New Zealand are relevant to Australia as it represents the experiences of the youth group when seeking employment. The Youth Group therefore propose that funding is spent in securing good relationships with employment agencies, with businesses and educating employers on 'ability not disability'.

² Ward, L, Mallet., R., Heslop, P. and Simons, K. 2003. Transition planning: how well does it work for young people with learning disabilities and their families? *British Journal of Special Education*. 30(3) pp.132-137, viewed 9th March 2011

³ Workbridge Media Overview, 2006, www.workbridge.co.nz/OtherDocuments/Media_Overview.doc Workbridge Mahiri, viewed 9th March 2011

- **Recommendation 4. Mentor Programs**

The Julia Farr Youth Group supports the introduction of funding for mentor programs to encourage access to higher education and to offer support and guidance on university and TAFE life. For example, Flinders University hosts '*The up the Hill Project*', which "facilitates the participation of people with intellectual disabilities in the social and educational life of the Flinders University. Eligible participants are assisted to select and [enrol in topics] and are supported by mentors to access and enjoy the services and experiences the University has to offer⁴".

Another example is the Julia Farr Youth Mentor Program. This is a recent initiative aimed at youth living with disability who would like guidance on accessing their local community (including higher education) by young adult mentors with lived experience of disability. It provides a unique opportunity for mentors to offer their experiences and support to a younger person about the transition from high school to higher education of their choice. The Youth Group are in strong support that this is an area under-funded by government and supports the introduction of mentor programs within higher education settings to support students living with disability and students from other disadvantaged groups. For more information about the Julia Farr Youth Mentoring Program contact Julia Farr Association on (08) 8373 8333 or georginae@juliafarr.org.au

- **Recommendation 6. Strengthened Professional Development for Teaching Staff**

The Youth Group recommends ongoing disability training for university staff so that they are up-to-date with new ideas, resources and approaches to inclusion, capacity building and personal authority for students living with disability. Improved teacher knowledge can assist with creating an understanding, encouraging and supportive environment where students living with disability can thrive alongside their non-disabled peers.

- **Recommendation 7. Accessible Services**

The Julia Farr Youth Group supports the *UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* which asserts that appropriate measures be taken to ensure "persons with disabilities [have] access, on an

⁴ADCET-Weblink, Flinders University – Up the Hill Project
<http://www.adcet.edu.au/View.aspx?id=3146> viewed 18 March 2011,pg. 1

equal basis with others, to the physical environment, to transportation [and] to information and communications⁵. It is important that lectures and services such as Faculty Disability Academic Advisors are located in accessible areas. The experience of one youth member when accessing his University Disability Advisor was that his office was located at the bottom of three flights of steps which was not accessible. There also needs to be other access features, such as hearing services/TTY, braille and big print options, ramps, automatic doors, accessible toilets, location of signs and vision dots. Access consultants are able to provide advice on improved access.

- **Recommendation 8. Disability Advisors and Negotiated Curriculum Plans**

Flinders University and the University of South Australia provide a free confidential service for students living with a disability. A Disability Advisor coordinates services so students can access university study and provides advocacy support to students on disability-related issues. This could be further improved by offering a case management service to assist students particularly with more significant disabilities so that they remain at university. This particular assistance can be worked into a negotiated curriculum plan to assist universities in providing support to students living with disability. Support may include negotiating extra time to complete an exam, providing big print reading material or a hearing loop.

- **Recommendation 9. Improved Communication and Advertising**

The Julia Farr Youth Group suggests improved communication and advertising, supporting participation amongst students living with disability at higher education. The group recommends that this is in the form of radio announcements, television commercials and brochure material. The experience of some youth group members is that they did not know that disability advisors are available to support them whilst at university.

- **Recommendation 10. Accountability of Funds**

The Julia Farr Youth Group recommends that providers of higher education be made accountable for funds in relation to students living with disability. Many students report that they do not know that funding is available or where the funding is being spent for students living with disability. The Youth Group recommends that higher education providers provide a report identifying where funds have been spent and how they have been used in a meaningful way for students. One way this can be achieved is through the student's

⁵ Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Article 9 - Accessibility
<http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml#top> viewed 18th March 2011, pg. 6

individual learning plan which highlights how much funding is available and how this funding is spent on the student.

- **Recommendation 11. Personal Financial Arrangements**

To increase access and participation amongst students living with disability, the Julia Farr Youth Group suggests the availability of personal financial arrangements that are individual to the person's financial position. "Poverty is particularly prevalent amongst people who have a disability. People with disabilities have lower workforce participation rates and are more likely to be unemployed than many other groups in the population".⁶ Many students living with disability also have extra costs in their life including the cost of access cabs, medication, the purchase of equipment or aids and access to appropriate services therefore making higher education out of the person's reach. The Youth Group encourage higher education providers to offer opportunities for students living with disability to assist with the cost of attending university or TAFE.

The Julia Farr Association supports these recommendations made by the Julia Farr Youth Group to address the Government's agenda of increasing access and participation amongst students from disadvantaged groups. The Julia Farr Youth Group is available for consultation to discuss these recommendations and can be contacted through the Julia Farr Association.

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⁶Australian Democrats Poverty in Australia
http://www.democrats.org.au/campaigns/poverty_in_australia/#disabilities, viewed 18th March 2011,
pg. 7