



## Submission to the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005

This submission is responding to the review question below:

- In the 15 years since the Standards were developed, **have the Standards contributed towards students with disability being able to access education and training opportunities** on the same basis as students without disabilities?

The Standards have certainly contributed towards students with disability being able to access education and training opportunities but there is still room for improvement and maintenance of progress made.

However, the adjustments, services and supports to maintain quality standards does depend very much on the defined categories of disability that are recognised as disability within Australian education settings. I would like to raise a growing concern about the omission of one important, disabling “condition” that deserves to be recognised in the Standards.

The category that I am proposing for inclusion is that of children and young people who have living with the outcomes of **complex trauma**. This type of trauma is due to child protection concerns resulting from relational harm due to physical, emotional, sexual abuse; neglect; family violence, etc.

There is abundant and growing evidence from neuroscience explaining the devastating impact that complex trauma (particularly when experienced in early childhood) can have on developing brains and bodies (nervous systems, endocrine systems, immune systems, etc.). This impact often leads to the disabling of capacities to access education. Victims of this type of trauma can experience severe difficulties with emotional self-regulation and the capacity to develop and maintain helpful relationships with adults and peers at school and in early childhood services. Impaired brain development and function can lead to an overactive sympathetic nervous system that results in an overly sensitive “fight, flight, freeze” response and a lack of (pre-frontal cortical) capacity to access curriculum and learning opportunities.

These young victims of trauma are often (but not always) receiving Child Protection Services and living in out-of-home care (e.g. foster care, residential homes, etc.), which already places them in an individually and socially disadvantaged position. They are also highly represented in suspension and exclusion statistics due to schools experiencing difficulties with managing challenging behaviours that result from living with the outcomes of complex trauma. These concerns exacerbate the disability and the inequitable access to education experienced by this vulnerable and victimised group of young Australians.

There is a rapidly growing emphasis on (what is referred to in Australia as) Trauma-Aware Education. This represents a paradigm shift away from viewing these children and young people as merely “badly



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behaved” or “refusing to engage”, (etc.) but rather as those experiencing the disabling conditions associated with the neurobiological impacts of living through complex trauma.

The Education Faculty at QUT is leading much national work in this area and is very keen to progress the discussion to include children and young people who are living with the disabling outcomes of “complex trauma” in the overall review of the 2020 review of the Disability Standards for Education. QUT delivers pre-service, in-service and post-graduate education options in “Trauma-Aware Schooling” to develop capacities for educators to work in an informed and more inclusive manner with these young learners. QUT has also developed “National Guidelines for Trauma-Aware Schooling” to help to guide practice in education settings (schools, early childhood services) and education systems.

QUT is very happy to provide further information to support the discussion of including this disabling condition within the review of the Standards.

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