



South Metropolitan TAFE Disability Access and Inclusion Plan 2017 – 2021

Introduction

South Metropolitan TAFE is Western Australia's most diverse training provider offering training to over 39 000 students each year on 14 campuses, locally, nationally and internationally.

South Metropolitan TAFE services the Perth south-west metropolitan region of Western Australia and comprises campuses from Fremantle to the Peel region and inland to Bentley, Thornlie and Jandakot. South Metropolitan TAFE offers nationally recognised and industry endorsed qualifications, including apprenticeship and traineeship training, as well as customised and short courses for commercial clients.

The Disability Access and Inclusion Plan (DAIP) reflects South Metropolitan TAFE's context of the provision of quality training services in an adult education environment. The plan is therefore shaped by Vocational Education and Training sector policy and requirements and reflects changing priorities whilst systematically addressing barriers to access over time. Steady progress including wide consultation and the implementation of best practice teaching and learning strategies continues to be made to improve access and inclusion for students with disability.

Policy Statement

South Metropolitan TAFE has a comprehensive Disability Services policy. The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework to enhance opportunities and demonstrate continued support for the provision of services for students with disability or medical conditions to ensure that these students have the same opportunities as other students to access the College's facilities and services. South Metropolitan TAFE recognises that quality vocational education and training is for all customers and is committed to providing accessible and equitable participation for students with disability to enable them to be fully and independently involved in all aspects of vocational training.

South Metropolitan TAFE utilises the Disability Services Commission (DSC) definition of "disability" based on the Disability services Act (1993).

A disability is any continuing condition that restricts everyday activities and:

- which is attributable to an intellectual, psychiatric, cognitive, neurological, sensory or physical impairment or a combination of those impairments
- which is permanent or likely to be permanent
- which may or may not be of a chronic or episodic nature
- which may result in substantially reduced capacity of the person for communication, social interaction, learning or mobility and a need for continuing support services¹.

¹ Definition courtesy of Disability Services Commission web page "What is a disability?" 21 March 2016

A disability may include any of the following:

Sensory Affecting vision and/or hearing.

Psychiatric Affecting a person's emotions, thought processes and behaviour, for example anxiety, phobias and depression.

Physical Affecting mobility and/or a person's ability to use their upper or lower body.

Neurological/Cognitive/Intellectual Neurological and cognitive disability includes acquired disability such as multiple sclerosis or traumatic brain injury. Intellectual disability includes intellectual and developmental disability which relate to difficulties with thought processes, learning, communicating, remembering information and using it appropriately, making judgments and problem solving. Intellectual disability is the result of interaction between developmentally attributable cognitive impairment, attitudinal and environmental barriers².

In addition to the specific legislation governing disability in the community, the following Codes, Standards and Acts assist in guiding, informing and supporting equal access and participation for students with a disability within South Metropolitan TAFE:

- Public Sector Standards
- Code of Conduct and WA Public Sector Code of Ethics
- Australian Qualification Training Framework (AQTF)
- Australian Quality Framework
- Occupational Safety and Health Act
- South Metropolitan TAFE's Strategic Plan
- Freedom of Information Act 1992

DAIP Background Information

The starting point for the development of the South Metropolitan TAFE DAIP was an analysis of the challenges, learning and success achieved with the strategies contained in the former ex-Challenger Institute and ex- Polytechnic West Disability Access and Inclusion Plans. Substantial progress was made across a range of outcomes during the period 2011-2016 in particular with regard to level of customer service and accessibility in both organisations. It was found that synergies existed and a number of former strategies were similar in nature and this has assisted with the task of planning, compiling and aligning the new DAIP.

² Definition courtesy of Disabilities Services Commission webpage "Types of disability" 21 March 2016.

Identification of areas for improvement

Challenges and areas for improvement in the current DAIP have also been identified as part of the process of compiling the new DAIP. These include the following:

- The broader disability sector and in particular the WA NDIS is experiencing a period of change and this will have an impact on the TAFE sector and the management of a student cohort with complex needs.
- Difficulties continue to be experienced obtaining meaningful feedback from students and community members on a range of aspects pertaining to study and accessibility; reasons may include disinterest, significant study and work commitments and survey fatigue.
- Current construction of new building works at Murdoch and Munster and the decommissioning of Fremantle campus is bringing both positive accessibility improvements and other challenges.

Consultation Strategy for the DAIP (2017-2021)

A number of consultation strategies were employed to canvas the opinions of current students, staff, disability organisations and the general public on the value and effectiveness of a variety of strategies as well as to obtain fresh suggestions and ideas. The aim of the consultation process was to gain a comprehensive understanding of the viewpoints of a range of stakeholders. The strategies decided upon were:

- Consultation with advocacy services, disability peak bodies and disability service providers
- Surveying of students, staff and members of the public
- Invitation of individual submissions from the community

A number of organisations were consulted for comment including Headspace, RUAH, The Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre, the Multicultural Services Centre of WA, the First People's Network and the Learning and Attentional Disorders Society of WA. In addition South Metropolitan TAFE contractors Martinovich Psychological Services were invited to comment.

A short and succinct online survey was compiled and made available in alternative format on request. Consideration was given to the provision of realistic response options, simple language provision of adequate time for feedback and use of the "undecided", "don't know" and "no response" where appropriate. In addition questions were carefully crafted to ensure understanding and to clarify the purpose for which they were being asked. In order to obtain maximum reach, the survey was advertised on the South Metropolitan TAFE website, in The West Australian newspaper and on the College's intranet.

An additional option of individual submissions was also provided to cater for personal preferences and to increase accessibility.

Findings of Consultation

In general the response from organisations was poor but the input from the organisations that did respond was helpful. Issues were discussed in detail and in-depth information was provided. In addition valuable networking contacts were made which will enhance South Metropolitan TAFE's ability to provide improved customer service to students with disability. The conclusion drawn is that while the staff of external organisations may be interested in providing feedback the reality of their roles means that they are often time-poor and this may be a barrier to doing so.

In spite of the advantages of surveys including time saving, anonymity and cost effectiveness, results were patchy and the response rate was lower than expected. However, as with the consultation with organisations mentioned above, the responses that were obtained were considered and helpful. Reasons for the poor student response rate were discussed with South Metropolitan TAFE's Marketing Department and one of the possibilities mooted as a barrier was that the end of the year is a busy time for students and that the survey may have been "missed" in between assessments, final submissions of assignments and academic emails. In retrospect it may have been better to choose a quieter time in the semester to send out the survey. In addition, although cognisance was taken of the fact that surveys may have disadvantages for people who have difficulty with reading and writing (the option of giving individual feedback was provided to mitigate this), the findings demonstrated a poor rate of individual submission.

It is important to note that in spite of barriers, South Metropolitan TAFE is an adult training provider and as such is preparing students for the demands of the workplace. Part of this preparation is that students need to learn to take responsibility for their study and support needs, check official correspondence, participate and communicate.

The final conclusion is that the findings of the consultation were mixed. Although the responses obtained provided useful comment it is fair to say that it would have been more helpful to have a higher response rate. From South Metropolitan TAFE's perspective it is important to note the learning that this experience has provided and be cognisant of it when planning future public consultations. Considerations for the future may include surveys being advertised on South Metropolitan TAFE's Face Book page and on the Student Portal.

Monitoring, reviewing and reporting

Reviewing of the DAIP will continue to occur on a five-yearly basis with staff, student and community consultation being conducted as a fundamental part of the process.

Regular bi-annual monitoring will take place to ensure that planned strategies are implemented effectively and timeously. Progress will be reported on in the Annual General Report.

The DAIP committee will continue to play an important role in the monitoring and assessment process through members' links with program areas and experience of how strategies are working for staff and students with disability. The customer comment and complaint process will also be used as a feedback mechanism, as will Student Services feedback, Client Contact Centre feedback and Student Support Services feedback. Regular monitoring will ensure that should new barriers be identified at any point, the DAIP can be easily amended to meet changing needs.

Promotion strategies

The DAIP is currently available on South Metropolitan TAFE's website at:

<http://www.southmetrotafe.wa.edu.au/currentstudents/studentsservices>

The final draft will be advertised in The West Australian newspaper, on the College's intranet site as well as on the website. Copies will be circulated to relevant stakeholders including contractors and the AEETC committee. The DAIP is available on request in the standard alternative formats under the regulations including:

- Electronic format
- Hard copy format in both standard and large print
- Audio format on cassette or compact disc
- By email
- Website

If any amendments are made during the 2017-2021 period these will be advertised.

Outcome 1: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the services of, and any events organised by, a public authority.

- Compilation of a checklist to be used during the creation of new teaching resources. (July 2017)
- Information and resources have been made available to staff on the College intranet site.
- The DAIP Committee provides guidance and a forum for progressing discussion and action planning. (February 2017)
- Compile accessibility guidelines for commonly used resource formats including audio, video and HTML5 with the objective of assisting staff to create course content that is inclusive and accessible and encompasses a broad range of teaching methodologies. (Dec 2018)
- Provide PD and consultation opportunities for lecturing staff to upskill in inclusive activity design and accessible content development with an emphasis on converting existing learning resources to accessible formats. (July 2018)

Outcome 2: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to access the buildings and other facilities of a public authority.

- Facilities is represented on the DAIP committee and provides regular updates on buildings and facilities access. (Dec 2018)
- Review accessible bays across campuses and work towards compliance where necessary. (July 2019)
- Ensure that campus lifts provide unrestricted public access where possible and feasible. (July 2018)
- Student Support Services to undertake regular reviews of egress plans with Facilities as part of a best practice approach to duty of care for students. (December 2017)

Outcome 3: People with disability receive information from a public authority in a format that will enable them to access the information as readily as other people are able to access it.

- Implementation of a Training Services process to identify student support needs at course commencement in line with standard 1.7 of the Standards for RTOs 2015. (July 2018)
- A focus on the implementation and delivery of high quality, sustainable training services across all Portfolio Areas. (Dec 2019)
- A focus on the implementation of a quality management system of key academic documentation. (Dec 2018)
- Prior to the commencement of a course a sufficient amount of training for each learner will be determined based on expected skills, knowledge and experience and flexibility options to manage study load will be discussed. (July 2017)
- Creation of a dedicated “technology hub” in campus libraries particularly for students with a disability but open for use by all students. It is envisaged that this will be a quiet zone where students with sensory impairment can work in private if they wish. Technology envisaged to include a tablet and stand for scanning purposes and a computer with Zoomtext installed. (July 2019)
- Student Support Services to undertake regular reviews with Library Resource Centre staff (LRCs) as part of a best practise approach to ensuring that students have access to appropriate technology. (Dec 2017)

Outcome 4: People with disability receive the same level and quality of service from the staff of a public authority as other people receive from the staff of that public authority.

- Introduction of guidelines to assist staff to better communicate with students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CaLD) in particular with regard to understanding disclosure, supporting documentation and confidentiality. (July 2017)
- Provision of referral services to and advocacy services for students from the Ethnic Disability Advocacy Centre (EDAC) in addition to advocacy from Student Support Services. (Dec 2018)
- Provision of referral and advocacy services from Multicultural Services Centre of WA in addition to advocacy from Student Support Services. (July 2017)
- Compilation of list of self-help online resources for staff to assist in the promotion of best practice customer service. (Dec 2017)
- Compilation of list of self - help online resources for students. (Dec 2018)
- Addition of information on the website and promotional material to raise awareness of the “Carers Recognition Act” and the eligibility of Carers to request reasonable adjustment measures where appropriate. (July 2019)
- Staff relationship-building and participation on agency committees such as the Kwinana Aboriginal Reconciliation group, Centrelink Rockingham and AbStudy to promote better inter-agency understanding of the needs of students with disability. (Dec 2017)
- South Metropolitan TAFE continues to build capacity by supporting staff to undertake internal and external training to assist them to better understand disability in the training context. (July 2019)

Outcome 5: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to make complaints to a public authority.

- People with disability have an opportunity to discuss concerns and grievances with Student Support Advisors in a confidential setting and receive assistance to resolve issues. (Dec 2017)
- Student Support Advisors to assist students with disability to access alternatives to online complaint and feedback submissions such as face to face meetings or hard copy forms. (July 2017)

- Formal feedback can be given and complaints made using South Metropolitan TAFE's user-friendly, best practice complaints management system. (Dec 2018)

Outcome 6: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to participate in any public consultation by a public authority.

- Ongoing surveying of students including the state student satisfaction survey, AQTF learner surveys and disability support effectiveness surveys. (Dec 2017)
- Ensure that copies of all surveys are available in alternative format upon request and that the availability of such alternative formats is promoted on the website and in promotional material. (Dec 2018)
- South Metropolitan TAFE regularly engages with agencies that support people with disability on training matters such as the NDIS program, Disability Employment Services and mental health support services. (July 2019)

Outcome 7: People with disability have the same opportunities as other people to obtain and maintain employment with a public authority.

- Reduce barriers by providing PD sessions for managers regarding the benefits of employing people with disabilities and information about what resources are available. (June 2018 then annually thereafter)
- A longer term project of developing and implementing information for employees and managers regarding disabilities i.e. resources available, how to seek support if a current employee develops a non- work related disability, Apps available to assist in managing disability in the workplace. (Dec 2019)
- Continue to further the SMTAFE Disability Employment Strategy and expand the number of employees with disabilities sourced through this initiative.(Dec 2020)
- A longer term project for work experience opportunities for people with disabilities across the organisation. (Feb 2020)