VICTORIA UNIVERSITY

STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN

2021–2023

If you get it right for students with disability, you get it right for all.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

We acknowledge the Ancestors, Elders and families of the Boonwurrung and Woiwurrung of the Kulin who are the traditional owners of University land. As we share our own knowledge practices within the University may we pay respect to the deep knowledge embedded within the Aboriginal community and their ownership of Country.
We acknowledge that the land on which we meet is a place of age old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal and that the Kulin people's living culture has a unique role in the life of this region.

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MESSAGE FROM DIRECTOR STUDENT SERVICES

As the University of Opportunity and Success, Victoria University (VU) continues its commitment to the ongoing review and improvement of its policies and practices that relate to student equity and disability through this fifth Student Accessibility Action Plan 2021-2023.

This Plan reaffirms our commitment to providing quality experiences and inclusive teaching and support services to continue VU's excellence in the West!

As we celebrate many effective collaborations between academics, student support services and students their access, participation and success is enhanced as we embrace all VU values.

Always welcoming

We…

- believe everyone deserves the chance to thrive.
- are inclusive, supportive and respectful.
- provide lifelong learning opportunities.
- appreciate the contribution that each person brings.
- and are proud to be part of the West of Melbourne.

Always ethical

We…

- respect identity, and culture.
- are fair and unbiased in the decisions we make.
- communicate openly and honestly.
- take responsibility for keeping people safe and well.
- and are conscious of the impact we make, locally and globally.

Always shaping the future

We…

- continually and boldly challenge the status quo.
- encourage critical enquiry and creative thinking.
- constantly adapt to achieve our goals.
- grow and pursue improvement in everything we do.
- empower ourselves to build a better future.

Always together

We…

- work collaboratively to generate solutions.
- share our knowledge so that others can grow.
- build lifelong connections with our student and partners.
- work closely with industry to produce job-ready graduates.
- engage with communities to make a real difference.

Leon Kerr

Director, Student Services

DEFINITIONS

Disability

The definition described in Part 1, Section 4 Interpretation in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992:

"disability" , in relation to a person, means:

    (a)   total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or

    (b)   total or partial loss of a part of the body; or

    (c)   the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or

    (d)   the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or

    (e)   the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or

    (f)   a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or

    (g)   a disorder, illness or disease that affects a person's thought processes, perception of reality, emotions or judgment or that results in disturbed behaviour;

          and includes a disability that:

    (h)   presently exists; or

    (i)   previously existed but no longer exists; or

    (j)   may exist in the future (including because of a genetic predisposition to that disability); or

    (k)   is imputed to a person.

To avoid doubt, a disability that is otherwise covered by this definition includes behaviour that is a symptom or manifestation of the disability.

Universal Design for Learning

According to CAST, Universal Design for Learning (UDL) is "a framework to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all people based on scientific insights into how humans learn".

CAST is a not for profit education research and development organisation that created the Universal Design for Learning framework and UDL Guidelines.

INTRODUCTION

As the University of Opportunity and Success, the VU community has a powerful moral purpose to provide vocational and higher education that transforms the lives of students. We are committed to being inclusive of students from a wide range of backgrounds and abilities and to providing learning experiences and research collaborations that meet the needs of our local communities.

The Student Accessibility Action Plan 2021-23 recognises VU'S commitment to making its equity and diversity values real and authentic for students and staff with disability. It reflects the philosophy of cultural competence and the acceptance of and respect for difference. The development of the fifth Student Accessibility Action Plan (2021-23) (AAP) continues to emphasize the importance of empowering students to grow their capabilities, transform their lives and opportunities as graduates.

This plan draws upon developments in the Australian Government and the tertiary education sector, in addition to the Transformative Agenda currently underway at VU.
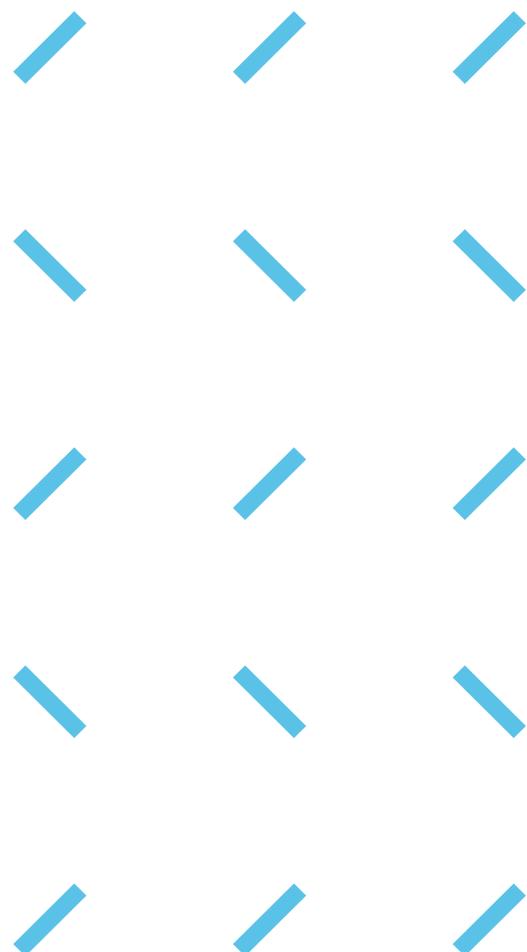
AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT CONTEXT

The Australian Government assists universities to support students with disabilities by funding the following programs administered by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) including:

◆ Additional Support for Students with Disability (ASSD) – a component of the Higher Education Disability Support Program, which pays a proportion of educational costs over $500 per student.

◆ Performance-Based Disability Support funding.

◆ Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support (DAAWS) – up to $5,000 per annum is paid by the government to support tutorial, interpreter and mentor services for students with disabilities.

There is no additional funding for services for international students with disabilities studying onshore. From 2021 the ASSD and Performance-Based Disability Support funding will be merged.

The VU Accessibility Action Plan 2021-2023 meets the objectives of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and the Disability Standards for Education 2005 and Guidance Notes (the Disability Standards). The Disability Standards specify for education and training providers how a person with a disability is able to participate in courses and programs on the same basis as a student without a disability

The Disability Standards cover:

◆ enrolment;

◆ participation;

◆ curriculum development;

◆ accreditation and delivery of course materials;

◆ student support services;

◆ and elimination of harassment and victimisation.

Once a student is admitted to a course, the University is obliged to apply reasonable adjustments to courses and assessments to enable student participation on the same basis as a student without a disability[1].

The Disability Standards contribute to positive outcomes for students with disability being able to access education and training opportunities and are reviewed every five years, with input to the government from specialist disability consultants and representatives of all education sectors. Recommendations from Australia Tertiary Education Network on Disability (ATEND), the peak professional organisation for Disability Practitioners and National Disability Coordination Officers (NDCO) in the Higher Education and Vocational Training sectors in Australia, made some specific recommendations to improve the Disability Standards and contribute to even better outcomes for students with disability.

In many disciplines VU is already meeting the recommendation to reinforce the principles of Universal Design for Learning in selection and development of course content at the design phase, prior to it becoming available to students, rather than retrofitting accommodations later. In terms of accessibility of course content, the acquisition of the Web Accessibility Indicator (WAI) Tools revealed a starting 76% accessibility rating across course materials. Along with associated capacity building actions outlined below, VU is well placed to improve accessibility for learning. Organisational Action Plans have the capacity to produce the systemic change which is required to eliminate disability discrimination and other attributes of discrimination, whether it be direct, or unintentional and indirect[2].

> The Disability Standards clarify the rights of students and the responsibilities of education providers. They are based on the position that: **all students, including students with a disability, should be treated with dignity and enjoy the benefits of education and training in an educationally supportive environment that values and encourages participation by all students, including students with a disability.**

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[1]   See Part 1, Section 4 Interpretation (1) in Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

[2]   For other Victoria University strategy and planning documents addressing equity and inclusion – see Cultural Diversity Strategy 2018-2021, Bathelmun Yalingwa Strategy 2017-2020, Access and Low SES Plan, Student Mental Health Strategy 2018-2020 and the Gender Affirmation strategy.

VU'S STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021-2023

VU's Student Accessibility Action Plan 2021-2023 is consistent with applicable Acts, Standards and Guidelines and Victoria University's Strategic Plans, Policies and Procedures. The list illustrates the context and framework for Victoria University's compliance with its legal obligations regarding students with disability and includes related Plans for student equity groups.

Acts
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth) (DDA)
- Equal Opportunity Act 1995 (Vic)

Standards
- Disability Standards for Education 2005
- Disability Access to Premises-Buildings Standards 2010
- Standards for Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) 2015

Guidelines
- Disability Standards for Education 2005 - Guidance Notes
- Australian Human Rights Commission: Guidelines on application of Premises Standards
- Wide Web Access: Disability Discrimination Act - Advisory Notes

Victoria University Strategic Plans
- Victoria University - The University of Opportunity and Success - Strategic Plan 2016-2021
- Victoria University's Transformational Agenda – November 2017

Victoria University Policies and Procedures
- Student Equity and Social Inclusion Policy
- Assessments for Learning HE and VE Policy and Procedure
- Courses Lifecycle – Inherent Requirements of Study Procedure
- Occupational Health and Safety Policy

Victoria University Strategies
- Accessibility Action Plan 2021-2023, Accessibility Action Plan for Students 2016-2020, Disability Action Plan 2011-2015, Disability Action Plan 2006-2008
- Refreshed Student Mental Health Strategy 2018-2021, Student Mental Health Strategy 2018-2020
- Bathelmun Yalingwa Strategy 2017-2020 (Shine Bright) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy
- Cultural Diversity Strategy 2018-2021
- Gender Affirmation Strategy 2020
- Access and Participation Plan 2020

Victoria University's Student Equity and Social Inclusion Policy was reviewed in 2020 and a statement of Universal Design was incorporated. Drawing upon the Universal Design for Learning – Best Practice Guidelines from the European Union, the Student Accessibility Action Plan 2021-2023 uses this blueprint to establish collaboration between academic staff, student support workers and students themselves. These collaborations will enable good practice, flexible teaching and learning methods and a system which ensures progress and quality assurance for students with disability, which will flow on to students from all equity cohorts.

With capacity building initiatives outlined in this Plan, greater familiarity with universal design is envisaged for all students and staff. In the context of education, three principles of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) or Inclusive Teaching Practice have been recognised based on neurological research about "what" students learn; "how" students process incoming information on past experience or background knowledge; and "why" students want to learn and engage. The three principles are:

◆ multiple means of representation to give learners various ways of acquiring information and knowledge;

◆ multiple means of expression to provide learners alternatives for demonstrating what they know; and

◆ multiple means of engagement to tap into learners' interests, offer appropriate challenges, and increase motivation[3].

The global COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated success with solutions and innovations focused on the remote class room setting. In March 2020, when restrictions first began, there was a moment in which some members of the disabled community wondered whether the pandemic might finally be the great equaliser. Neurodiverse people and those with chronic illness were finally being allowed to demonstrate that working outside a classroom could be just as productive.

At VU, face to face classes moved to digitally supported remote learning swiftly in March 2020 and many students, academic and teaching staff and support staff made the necessary adjustments to study, teach and work from home. This new way of learning, teaching and delivering support services for students has been challenging for many. However innovative solutions were piloted and problem solving thrived.

According to the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET) Guidelines[4] some institutions are seizing the opportunity to reconsider ways of working for the future by increasing their focus on flexibility and exploring new ways of supporting learning and teaching, such as online and blended delivery. To some extent, increased use of video, quizzes, polling and other creative approaches for students were introduced at VU when course materials were re-designed for Block Model, these are likely to continue. A rethinking by universities of their use of campus spaces, event planning and facilities has occurred.

While institutions are hopeful of transitioning to being back on campus in 2021, the nature of the current environment remains dynamic and unpredictable. It is likely that COVID-19 will continue to create upheaval and disruption for the medium term, at least, with longer-term impact for some. Given the widespread agreement that we are in an increasingly 'VUCA' world (characterised by Volatility, Uncertainty, Complexity and Ambiguity), development of guidelines for responding to the needs of staff and students with disability, and students with mental illness, will be beneficial regardless of the duration of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Along with the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) and the Disability Standards, the Student Charter, the Student Equity and Social Inclusion Policy, the Assessment for Learning – Adjustments to Assessment Procedure HE and the Assessment for Learning – Assessment Procedure VET are the predominant VU policies directing the work of Accessibility Services and Student Wellbeing services in liaison with Colleges.

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3. kurzweiledu.com/udl-three-principles-p4.html

4. Responding to the needs of staff and students with disability in COVID-19 return-to-campus planning for Australia's Tertiary Institutions, Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET) July, 2020 p5.
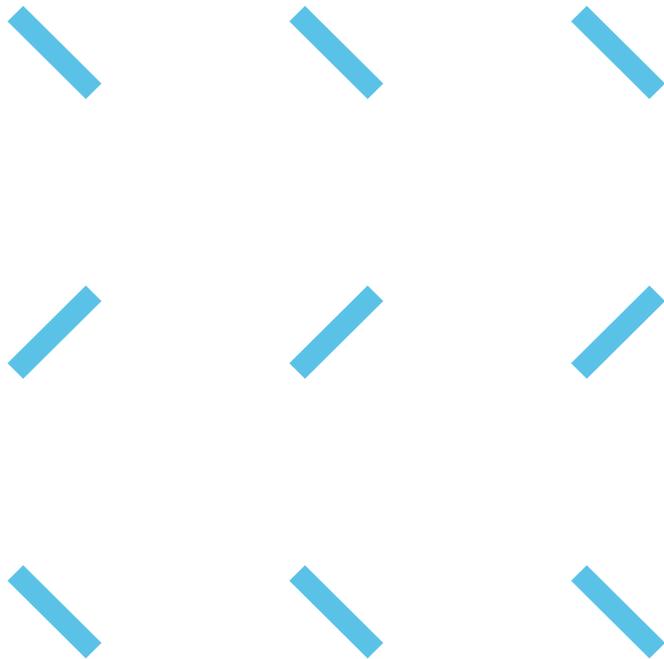
Victoria University Polytechnic – TAFE sector

In 2019, Victoria University Polytechnic was awarded the Inclusive Training Provider of the Year Award, which recognises exceptional training providers within the Victorian Government's vocational education and training system who have demonstrated outstanding improvements with regard to the achievement, engagement and well-being of students with additional needs. The general student population of Victoria University Polytechnic feel fortunate to learn in a setting where there's a rich representation of cultures and all levels of ability, but it's not without its challenges. VU Polytechnic's catchment includes areas of extreme disadvantage with associated chronic mental and physical health issues, however students with disability are fully accommodated to realise their academic merit. This award is also recognition of our collective efforts as an organisation in creating an accessible, safe and inclusive environment.

Free TAFE courses introduced by the Victorian Government in 2019 attracted increasing numbers of students to VU Polytechnic, as new doors of opportunity for students to train across a wide range of growth industries were opened. In October 2020, VU contributed to the Victorian Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee Inquiry into Access to TAFE for learners with disability. A survey of all VU Polytechnic staff sourced a range of suggestions which were summarised in the VU Polytechnic submission[5].

5. To access the VU Polytechnic submission, go to
    parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/eic-LA/TAFE_access_inquiry/Submissions/Submission_14_-_Victoria_University_-_16_October_2020_Redacted.pdf

Victoria University – Higher Education sector

The fourth VU Accessibility Action Plan for Students 2016-2020, introduced a range of initiatives as the University implemented its Transformative Agenda and Block Model learning. The transformation of classes to Block Model continues as "bedding in" continues for undergraduate courses. Block Model options for Post Graduate courses for students commencing in 2021 are becoming available with some variation in the duration of the post-graduate classes, depending on the discipline, likely to attract post graduate students with disability.

The transformation of classes to Block Model reduced the traditional higher education semester of twelve weeks, whereby students studied four units at the same time, to single units over four weeks, whereby students study one unit intensely over a short four week time frame. This innovation revolutionised higher education at VU with encouraging results as student enrolment, participation and success increases. The introduction of Block Model learning in the higher education sector involved significant redesign of course materials within each discipline. The University's teaching support area – Connected Learning - acquired Web Accessibility Indicator (WAI) Tools in 2020. The WAI tools provide teaching teams with 'accessibility ratings' of course materials. This initiative contributed to capacity building products and teaching teams are encouraged to improve their course material accessibility ratings in support of students with print disabilities, who require screen reading software to access their learning materials. Teaching teams are also encouraged to apply captions to video materials in support of deaf and hearing impaired students.

In addition, the Courses Lifecycle – Inherent Requirements of Study Procedure was updated, providing guidelines for discipline leaders to produce Inherent Requirement statements. Inherent Requirement statements document the non-academic skills required of graduates in many professions. They assist students with disabilities by confirming the skills required to be admitted to many professions. Students are required to acquire and demonstrate the skills before they graduate.

CAPACITY BUILDING INITIATIVES

With capacity building initiatives over the life of the VU Accessibility Action Plan 2021-2023, awareness of the principles of Universal Design for Learning should improve and motivation to teach inclusively should be further embedded, with course materials, teaching and service delivery allowing improved access. Some barriers to access and participation for students with disability will be removed, new strategies for further improving resources and administration will emerge and VU will deliver more supportive and inclusive educational experiences for students with disabilities.

Capacity building promotes social inclusion and prevents discrimination and harassment. Along with improved liaison with all areas, on behalf of students with disability, a whole of University approach to support students with disability to achieve study success is enhanced, free of discrimination and harassment. Student wellbeing and success is not solely the responsibility of Student Wellbeing services – all Colleges, Victoria Polytechnic Centers, the Learning Hub, Library services, Information Technology services, Student Life and Leadership, Student Advising, and VU Employ all work directly with Higher Education and Polytechnic students from to support their success.

Accessibility, mental health, equity, opportunity and fair process is a whole of university responsibility. Student Wellbeing services comprises five small teams - Accessibility Services, Counselling, Advocacy, Student Support (Welfare Services) and Chaplaincy - these units work collaboratively with all areas of the University to remove individual and systemic obstacles such as disadvantage, distress, discrimination and disability. Student Wellbeing Services creates opportunities for students to thrive, to be empowered and to seek full advantage of learning and life opportunities and drives the outcomes of the Student Accessibility Action Plan 2021-23 and the Refreshed Student Mental Health Strategy 2018-2021. Student Wellbeing services play an important role in educating the VU community about the important role all students and staff play in promoting student wellbeing.

A vision for Universal Design for Learning

Accessibility Liaison Officers and Student Wellbeing Services practitioners are encouraged to be Agents for Change to promote Universal Design for Learning. Along with representatives of the Accessibility for Learning sub-committee and the Access Plans Advisory group, ideas for best practice in the learning environment will be negotiated with individual academics and discipline leaders. Suggestions affecting students with disabilities in the Student Administration area, for example what would help to remove an information barrier, will be discussed and referred to the relevant staff or working group for action.

Guidelines for academic and professional staff will be produced and capacity building encouraged so that Disability Awareness, Universal Design for Learning and Inclusive Practice becomes routine. Partnerships and collaboration as peers, with handover protocols and systems support for academics and student wellbeing practitioners to share knowledge in a community of practice, ensures knowledge of the ways individual students have succeeded will be handed on to future teaching and support staff. A streamlined communication sharing process within the learning environment should improve the success of students with disability.

The three-way collaboration between students with Access Plans, Accessibility Liaison Officers and academics sets up a vision for success for students with Access Plans which will flow on to the success of others.

ACCESS PLAN & REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

An Access Plans is a document produced by an Accessibility Liaison Officer which summarises recommendations for teaching and assessment adjustments.

Awareness of the support available for students with disabilities is promoted during admission, enrolment and information activities, orientation sessions, on the VU web site, and in online induction modules on VU Collaborate (the Learning Management System at VU). Academics and Student Services Advisors may also refer students to Accessibility Services for advice.

Students with health conditions or disabilities that fit the broad definition[6] of "disability" within the DDA, including students who have caring responsibilities, are eligible to register with Accessibility Services and these students are the focus of the Student Accessibility Action Plan 2021-2023. The disability types recognised by the Department of Education, Skills and Employment (DESE) are:

◆ Acquired Brain Injuries
◆ Deaf (Auslan) and Hearing impairments (non-sign)
◆ Vision Impairments
◆ Medical Conditions
◆ Mental Illness
◆ Intellectual
◆ Physical
◆ Mobility disabilities
◆ Specific Learning Disabilities – such as Dyslexia, Dyscalculia, Dysgraphia
◆ Other – the range of Neuro diversity conditions, e.g. Autism Spectrum Conditions, Asperger's Syndrome, Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder and Attention Deficit Disorder
◆ Carers

In seeking reasonable adjustments to courses and assessments, students with disabilities are required to share evidence of professional advice with the University[7]. This independent advice might be a detailed assessment by an educational psychologist, or advice from a medical practitioner. The advice should describe the nature of the student's disability, how the disability affects the students' ability to participate in learning and recommended adjustments that are appropriate for the student. For health conditions, the student provides a Health Practitioner's Report; for sensory disabilities, an audiology report; and for neuro diversity conditions, such as Dyslexia or 'Other' conditions the students provides an Assessment from an educational psychologist or preferably other independent expert.

The Accessibility Liaison Officers (ALO) and students then meet to discuss the range of support services that are available to minimise the impact of the health condition or disability on learning. Verification of students' disabilities remains confidential and supporting documents are filed securely within the Accessibility Services Client Management System. For some students, the obligation to verify an illness or disability by a professional may give the impression the service relies on an outdated medical model of service, however, the reality is that Accessibility Services along with all units in Student Wellbeing Services operate under a social model of disability, or strengths based person-centred model, whereby students are encouraged to learn independently and to negotiate directly with academics. The student signs a Consent form which gives permission for Accessibility Services to notify Colleges and the Assessment Unit about any Reasonable Adjustments to a course or assessment. ALOs are available to academics and students for follow up advice and support, this is particularly important when support arrangements are complex or if the student has extenuating health circumstances.

Options for Reasonable Adjustments vary according to the Disability Type and have been sourced from ADCET resources[8]. Recommendations for reasonable adjustments are summarised in (learning) Access Plans, which are shared with Course Coordinators (HE) and Course Managers (VE) to enable distribution of Access Plans and awareness of the adjustments needed for a particular student. When making reasonable adjustments the integrity of the course or program and assessment requirements and processes are maintained. Over time, the need for Access Plan documents should diminish as inclusive teaching practice is adopted and embedded in course design and options for flexible assessments become more commonplace – see Access Plan Dissemination Flow Chart below.

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6. See Part 1, Section 4 Interpretation (1) in Disability Discrimination Act 1992.

7. The Disability Standards for Education 2005 – Guidance Notes, Part 4.2 Making Reasonable Adjustments (Standards Part 3).

8. ADCET adcet.edu.au/inclusive-teaching/

In order to authenticate the VU commitments to inclusive and equitable learning, all design and teaching teams are encouraged to embed Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles into the course design and teaching practice. Likewise Student Services, Student Administration and all other areas at VU are also encouraged to adopt inclusive approaches to service delivery and to implement innovations to increase the ways students can access their service.

People with disability constitute 18% of the population. The percentage of students that have declared a disability at enrolment at VU fluctuates considerably. A VU Data Insights report dated 14 September 2020, revealed that on average 5% of students enrolled in Higher Education Colleges declared a disability when they enrolled, and 9% of students enrolled in VU Polytechnic courses declared a disability upon enrolment. The actions in the Accessibility Action Plan will assist Victoria University to support students with disability to succeed and move into rewarding careers. They also meet its objective of providing high quality educational services to the whole community.

Access Plan – Dissemination & Implementation Flowchart

The flow chart was produced by Accessibility Services. The Access Plan Dissemination and Implementation flowchart identifies the actions and responsibilities needed to be taken by the student, the Accessibilty Liaison Officer (ALO) and the academic or teacher.

Navigate your way using the steps, columns and arrows. If you have any concerns about a particular Access Plan, please contact the ALO listed on the Access Plan or contact accessibility@vu.edu.au with student ID number in the subject line of the email message.

Please see the Dissemination & Implementation Flowchart on the

STUDENT

Students that declare a disability on enrolment and select "yes" to contact are invited by Student Services to contact Accessibility Services for advice and follow up.

Step 1: Initiation

Student initiates appointment with Accessibility Services (AS).

Step 2: Negotiation

Student and ALO negotiate Access Plan (AP).

Step 3: Dissemination of AP

ALO OPTION
(recommended)

Student gives ALO permission to forward AP to Course Coordinator/ College representative (HE)* or Course Manager (VU Polytechnic)

*List of students with are sent to Course Coordinators in higher education one week before the block period commences.

For VU Polytechnic lists are forwarded on the last day of the month for dissemination to class teachers.

STUDENT OPTION
(move to Step 5)

Student elects to distribute AP to Academic independently at the commencement of every Block period.

Student forwards a copy of the AP to the Unit Coordinator before their first class in every Block period.

ACCESSIBILITY LIAISON OFFICER (ALO)

ALO forwards a copy of the AP to the Course Coordinator or College representative.

*To cross check AS sends lists of students with AP to Course Coordinators.

Step 4: Negotiation

ALO and Academic liaise if AP requires clarification.

Course Coordinator or College representative forwards the AP to the Unit Coordinator at the commencement of every Block study period.

ACADEMIC

All academics are encouraged to promote Student Wellbeing Services

Step 1: Initiation

At the beginning of the first class of every Block period, academic announces an invitation to all students to:

a. contact Accessibility Services if learning is impacted by an illness or disability
b. remind students to undertake VU Collaborate Induction Modules.

Step 5: Solution

1. Academic reads Access Plan before the first class.
2. Academic checks Inclusive Teaching recommendations, and, if applicable attends Inclusive Teaching training.
3. Reasonable adjustments are implemented by teaching staff.

Outcomes:
- Learning barriers are minimised.
- VU academics and teachers incorporate inclusive teaching strategies into their practice.

Governance & Collaboration

Below are a range of goals and actions to improve accessibility of information for students with disability. The Student Accessibility Action Plan 2021-23 will incorporate student voices into the governance of the Accessibility Action Plan Working Group (AAPWG).

1. Accessibility Action Plan Working Group (AAPWG)

The AAPWG comprises representatives of Executive from all areas of VU. The aim for the representatives is to who meet on a quarterly basis to discuss Implementation and monitor progress of specific actions.

2. Accessibility for Learning Sub Committee

This sub-committee was convened in response to the acquisition of the Web Accessibility Indicator (WAI) tools. The sub committee meets on a monthly basis and aims to forward initiatives and recommend deliverables, targets and responsibilities related to the acquisition of the Web Accessibility Indicators (WAI) Tools and the availability of resources for the remediation work. The sub-committee will continue to meet regularly to discuss strategies for each discipline to improve their course material 'accessibility' ratings over time. Students with Access Plans will be encouraged to attend both this and the AAPWG meetings.

3. Access Plans Advisory Group

Consultations with students occur with Accessibility Liaison Officers regularly. An advisory group comprising students with Access Plans and wellbeing practitioners is being established. This advisory group will hear student voices, discuss suggestions and where practicable, work with all areas of the university to implement solutions to improve the learning environment for students with Access Plans. The advisory group is to meet on a monthly basis to listen to students' contributions and inform the university about the learning environment along with creative ideas that will assist their fellow students.
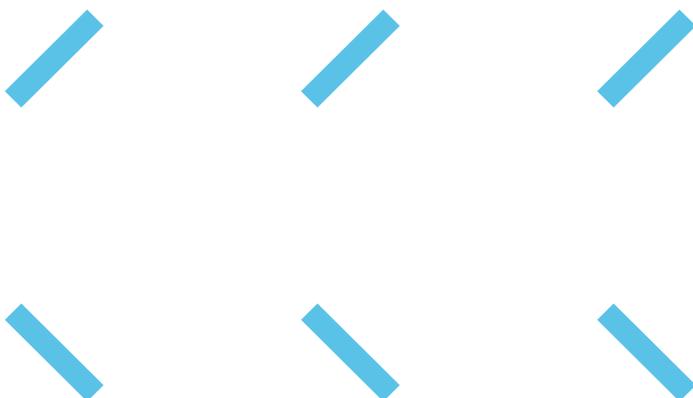
IMPLEMENTATION OF THE STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY ACTION PLAN 2021–2023

Responsibility for implementation of the Accessibility Action Plan is shared by all staff of the University, predominantly academics, learning designers, Student Wellbeing practitioners and members of the Accessibility Action Plan Working Group. Areas and work units with responsibility for specific parts of the Accessibility Action Plan, such as improving access to services, are encouraged to develop their own Key Performance Indicators. Progress on these will be reported at quarterly Accessibility Action Plan Working Group meetings.

Implementation of many of the actions outlined in this Plan will reduce the barriers to access and participation in learning for students with disabilities. Capacity building initiatives, especially with regard to universal design for learning for academic and professional staff, will increase staff confidence and satisfaction, and improve equity and outcomes for students with disabilities. All measures VU and VUP take to improve access for students with disabilities will directly benefit all students because **'if you get it right for students with disability, you get it right for all!'**
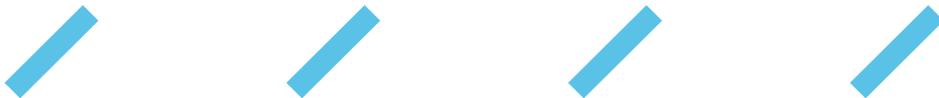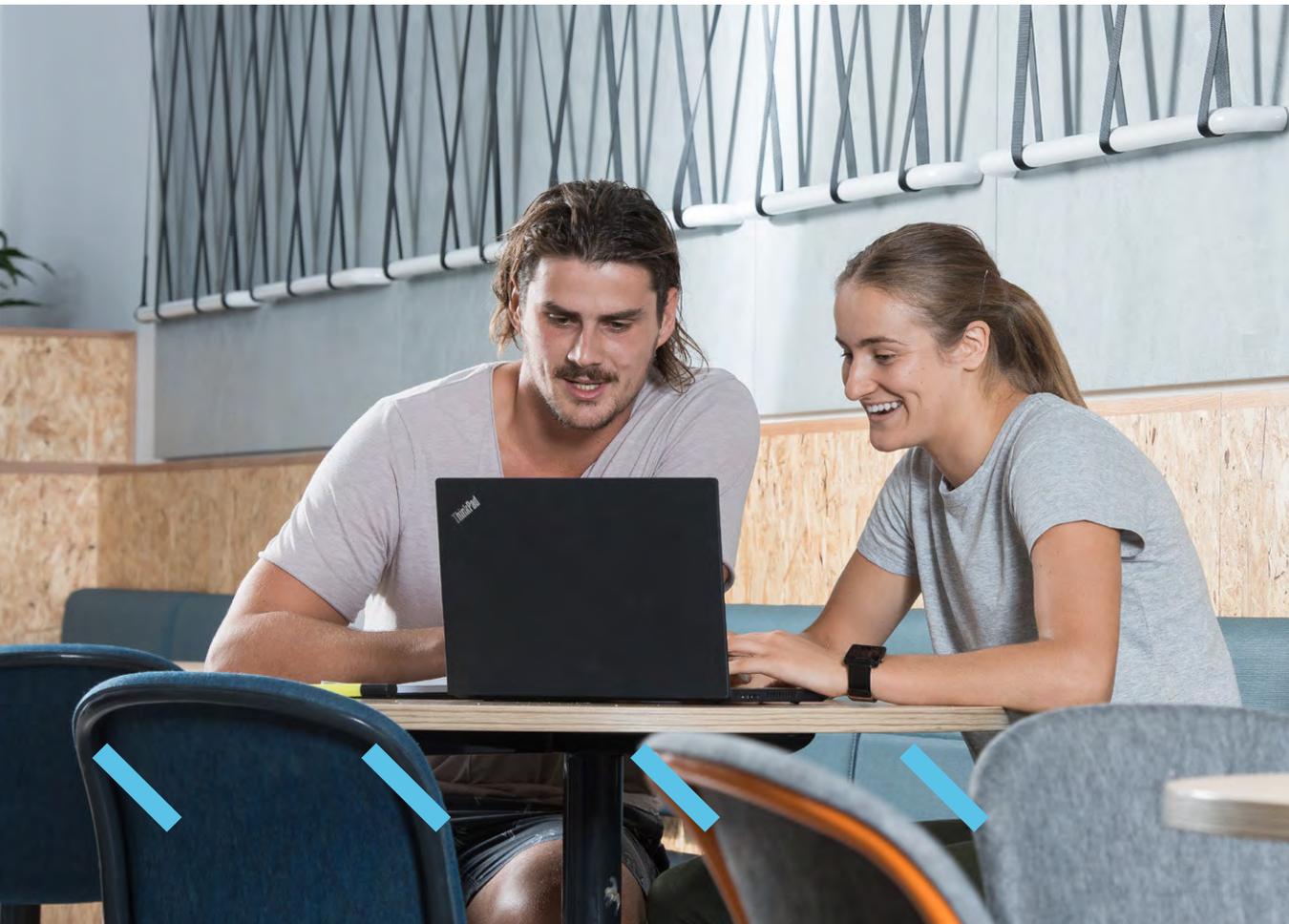
IF YOU GET IT RIGHT FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITY, YOU GET IT RIGHT FOR ALL

ACTION AREA & GOALS

Five Areas across VU are the focus for activities in the Accessibility Action Plan for Students 2021-2023, each with broad goals.

Broad goals for each action area are listed in table 1. The rationale, specific details, responsible areas for implementing each target and project partners are below. Status reports on the Implementation of Accessibility Action Plan targets and actions along with timelines will be produced quarterly for the AAPWG to monitor progress and show how targets are tracking.

1. Culture and Inclusiveness

- Develop resources and promote a culture of inclusiveness and respect that understands and responds to disability, accessibility, inclusion and Universal Design as everyone's responsibility and everyone benefits.
- Improve awareness of Accessibility and Wellbeing Services for all students.
- Prepare Guidelines for staff who support students with disability and upload to VU Collaborate and promote face to face and online workshops as required.

2. Establish an Access Plan Advisory Group (APAG).

- Student Engagement and Support.
- All student activities, processes and systems are welcoming, accessible and inclusive, and students with disability are empowered stakeholders who are enabled to participate equally in all aspects of university life.
- Improve awareness of support services available for students with disability.
- Streamline student progress, administration and communications.
- Align plans, strategies and outcomes from the Student Mental Health Strategy into this Accessibility Action Plan.
- Monitor outcomes from the University Special Employment Partnership (USEP).
- Assist students to access Learning Disability Assessment Services (LDAS).

3. Learning and Teaching

- Continuously improve and review course design and delivery, communication and liaison processes, and inherent requirement documents to enable students with disability to succeed as independent learners.
- Utilize the Courses Lifecycle - Inherent Requirements of Study Procedure.
- Co-convene 'Accessibility for Learning' sub-committee.
- Support College staff with advice about reasonable adjustments and Access Plans.
- Outreach to Course Coordinator and Course Manager networks.
- Support VET Teachers.

4. Digital Information and Services

- Ensure online environments and resources across all areas are accessible to students and staff, and student support systems are integrated to assist liaison between Student Services and Colleges.
- Improve accessibility of course materials on VU Collaborate.
- VU webpages (vu.edu.au) is accessible and downloads are available in alternate format.
- Advocate for Accessibility skills to be added to VU Student Graduate Attributes.
- Upgrade software and equipment in Assistive Technology labs.

5. Environment and Physical Access

- Incorporate best practice to progress modification of existing built environments, facilities and grounds, undertake audits and prioritize access improvements, where practicable.
- Improve facilities for students and staff with wheelchairs and other physical disabilities, where practicable.
- Promote the PEEP referral protocol.
- Identify and where practicable, renovate and furnish sensory safe rooms on large campuses.
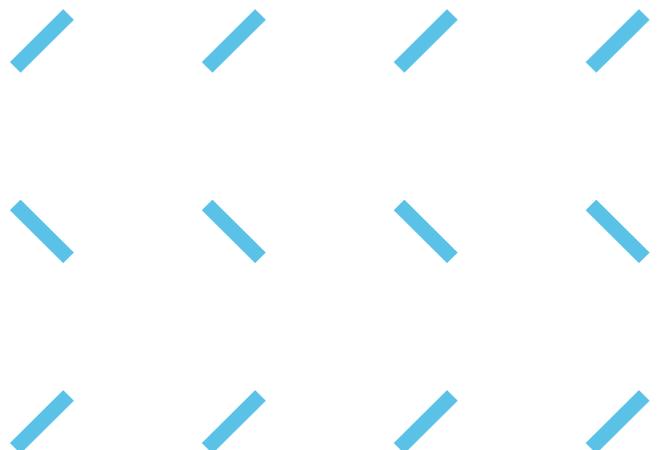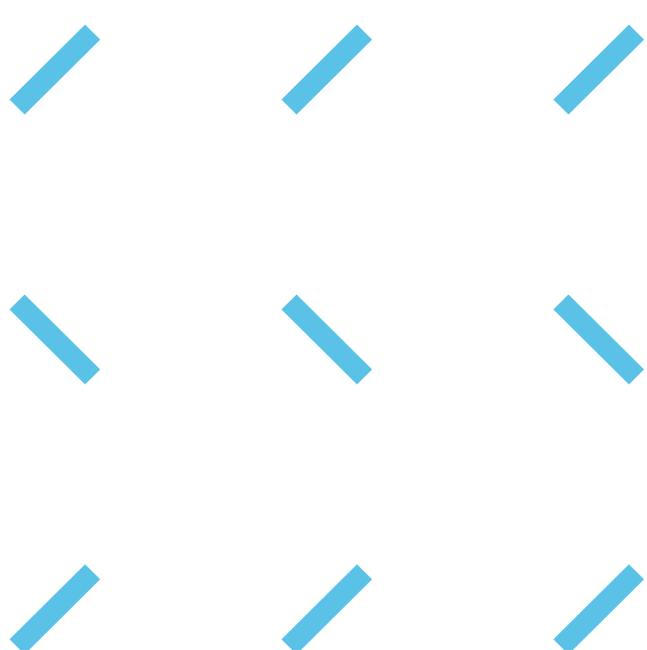
ACTION AREA 1 – CULTURE & INCLUSIVENESS

Goal

Develop resources and promote a culture of inclusiveness and respect that understands and responds to disability, accessibility, inclusion and Universal Design as everyone's responsibility and everyone benefits.

In order to promote a culture of inclusiveness and respect for students with disabilities, all VU staff who support students are encouraged to undertake online training. The VET Educators online module, and/or the Disability Awareness module were loaded onto VU Develop in November 2020. Promotion of these and "coming soon" modules will address a gap in the resources available for staff about disability, accessibility, universal design. These staff materials to be produced will be accessible to staff from a dedicated VU Develop space for staff.

To remind staff of the existence of the modules, a communication strategy including a calendar of staff reminders will be advertised via Global messages and Yammer posts.

In order to build staff capacity and to address gaps in procedures that are supportive of Students with Access Plans, two VU resources guides: 1) Operational Guidelines for Academic and Professional Staff and 2) Operational Guidelines for Students with Access Plans will be developed and disseminated. These resources will complement the existing Accessibility Services Practice Manual.

To guide and improve liaison between Accessibility Services, Colleges and other areas, a Students with Access Plans Advisory Group will be established to hear stakeholders' voices and expertise that comes with lived experience of disability and enablers that improve access for all students.

Culture & Inclusiveness

	ACTIONS	TASK DESCRIPTION	PROJECT PARTNERS
1.1	Improve awareness of Accessibility and Wellbeing Services for all students.	Develop a calendar of disability awareness across the year for facebook posts/digital screens. Call to action is for all students to undertake Disability Awareness module and student online induction in VU Collaborate.	Accessibility Services, Wellbeing Services and Student Communications.
1.1.2	Assist students with disability to transition to university life.	Assign and populate an Accessibility Services VU Collaborate space with Operational guidelines for Students with Access Plans with links to relevant information and resources, which is organised by Disability Type.	Accessibility Services.
1.1.3	Improve reading and study skills for students.	Develop workshops to demonstrate Assistive Technology for students in Learning Hub to produce handouts and instructions.	Accessibility Services and Learning Hub.
1.2	Prepare Guidelines for staff who support students with disability and upload to VU Collaborate and promote as required.	Produce Operational Guidelines for Academic and Professional staff to be available to staff online. This will include case studies for every Disability Type to illustrate the benefits of UDL/Referral protocols; Education Standards; Student Equity and Inclusion Policy, etc.	Accessibility Services.
1.2.2		Produce Student Wellbeing slides for inclusion in the Master VUCollaborate course materials template as per OHS slides.	Connected Learning, and Student Wellbeing.
1.2.3		Simplify processes for identifying disability and encourage VET staff to undertake Disability Awareness and VET Educators training throughout the year and draw attention to Universal Design for Learning (UDL) principles in Student Equity and Inclusion Policy.	Vic Polytechnic Course Advisers and educators.
1.2.4		Produce slides for face to face staff training on UDL, Disability Standards and develop a Road Show schedule of face to face workshops for all campuses.	Accessibility Services and People and Culture.
1.3	Establish an Access Plan Advisory Group (APAG).	Formulate Terms of Reference; recruit members; Work with existing committees and groups to (i) forward access and participation across the student life cycle (ii) consult with students to authenticate student experiences and inform improvements.	Accessibility Services with representatives from VUSU, Students as Partners, Student Ambassadors, Student Life, Student Mentors, College Societies, Work Integrated Learning (WIL) teams and College staff.
1.3.2		Prepare schedule of meetings and upload to staff intranet and include in Operational Guidelines for Students With Access Plans.	
1.3.3		Disseminate Annual CFQ feedback to relevant areas and collaborate with work units to implement solutions.	Accessibility Services and relevant work unit.
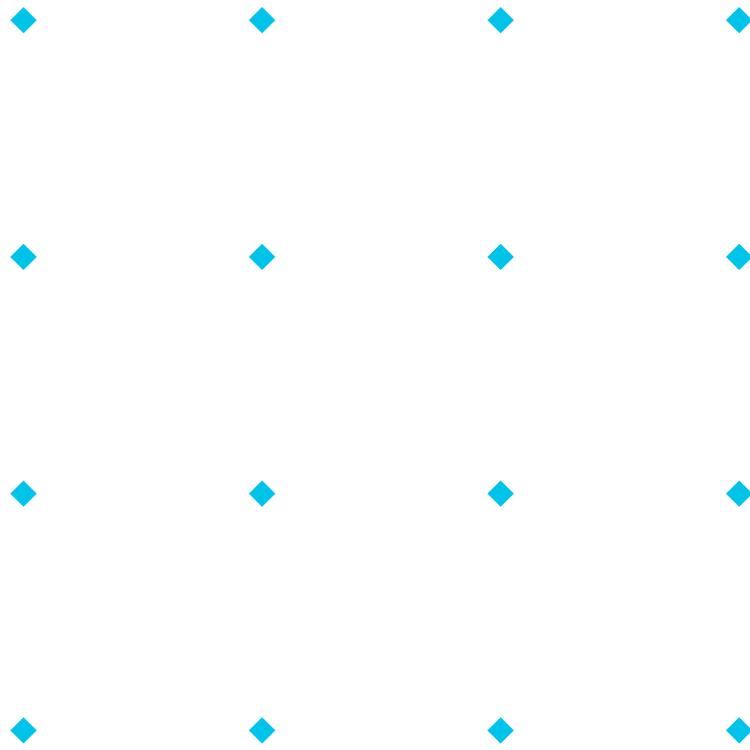
ACTION AREA 2 – STUDENT SUPPORT & ENGAGEMENT

Goal

All student activities, processes and systems are welcoming, accessible and inclusive, and students with disability are empowered stakeholders who are enabled to participate equally in all aspects of university life.

Action Area 2 covers the student life cycle across Student Services and Student Administration portfolios including: Admissions, Enrolment, Orientation, Events, Clubs and Societies, Learning Hub, Student Mentors, Library Services, Wellbeing Services, Assessments, WIL teams, VU Employ and in the Marketing portfolio - Future Students.

To improve access and empower participation of students with disability in University Life, actions and targets in Action Area 2 will address barriers and instil a strong sense of belongingness for all students, particularly students with disabilities. Capacity Building to embed Universal Design principles to service delivery will benefit all staff and students, for example Library services and Accessibility Services to collaborate with Colleges regarding Alternate Format text books.

Student Support & Engagement

|	ACTIONS	TASK DESCRIPTION	PROJECT PARTNERS
2.1	Assist students with disability with pre-admission enquiries.	Where practicable, referrals to Accessibility Services to occur pre admission and enrolment confirmation.	Contact Centre.
2.1.2	Improve awareness of support services available for students with disability.	Admissions unit to inform Accessibility Services of SEAS applicants in Disability category.	Student Administration – Admissions/Enrolment team.
2.1.3		Admissions to include a sentence about Accessibility Services in offer letter with links to further information.	
2.1.4		Expand existing Enrolment Project outcomes. Facilitate contact with students who declare a disability on Enrolment and expand methods of contact.	Student Administration, Student Communications and Contact Centre.
2.1.5		Evaluate the Enrolment Project activity.	Accessibility Services, Business Systems and Reporting (BS&R), Student Administration.
2.1.6		Invite students with Access Plans to update Disability status on Student Management System.	Accessibility Services and Student One Project.
2.1.7		Student Leaders, Clubs and Societies advance accessibility awareness, increase access to VU student events and maintain accessibility training within Clubs and Societies.	Student Life and Leadership.
2.1.8		Establish peer mentoring and peer to peer support groups for students with Autism Spectrum Conditions.	Student mentoring and Accessibility Services.
2.1.9		Investigate options to establish other peer to peer support groups for students with Access Plans/disability.	
2.1.10		Monitor referrals for individual tutoring for Students with Access Plans.	Learning Hub and Accessibility Services.
2.1.11		Collaborate with Open Day team to ensure accessibility issues are met for future students.	Future Students Accessibility Services.
2.2	Streamline student progress, administration and communications.	Promote initiatives and improve access to assist students with disabilities to better manage administrative tasks.	Student Administration, Student Advising and Student Advocacy.
2.2.2		Develop an alternative method to submit Special Consideration applications to assist students with disabilities with extenuating health circumstances.	College Liaison, Accessibility Services and Assessments Unit.
2.2.3		Develop systems to track progress of students with Access Plans.	Accessibility Services and BS&R.
2.2.4		Submit A34 request for Block study results for Students with Access Plans.	Colleges, Student Administration and BS&R.

Student Support & Engagement continued

	ACTIONS	TASK DESCRIPTION	PROJECT PARTNERS
2.3	Align plans, strategies and outcomes from the Student Mental Health Strategy into this Accessibility Action Plan.	Under the Student Wellbeing Services Delivery Framework - define and identify students with disabilities with extenuating health circumstances and monitor liaison during each Block period. For example in students with low learner autonomy, complex support, IT/digital divide, poor internet access, outdated computers, students with attendance impacts.	Accessibility Services and Student Wellbeing.
2.3.2		Review of absence impacts for students with disabilities - review opportunities to record sessions to minimise impacts associated with attendance.	Accessibility Services.
2.4	Monitor outcomes from the University Special Employment Partnership (USEP).	Collaborate with VU Employ to attract students with disability to take up career and resume advice and job seeking assistance with on campus specialist employment service.	VU Employ.
2.4.2		Refer students approaching graduation to the Disability Employment Service Consultants.	
2.4.3		Work with WIL teams to build capacity for placement staff.	WIL Team.
2.5	Assist students to access Learning Disability Assessment Services (LDAS).	Work with the Psychology discipline to develop an in-house Learning Disability Assessment Service (LDAS) to assist VU students with dyslexia or other neuro diversity impacts with formal diagnosis.	College of Health and Biomedicine - Psychology Placement Project for PG students.
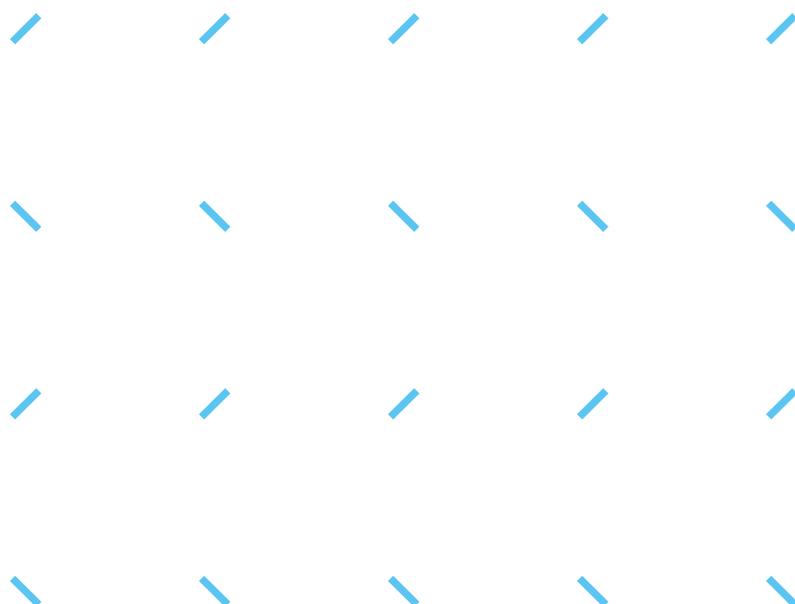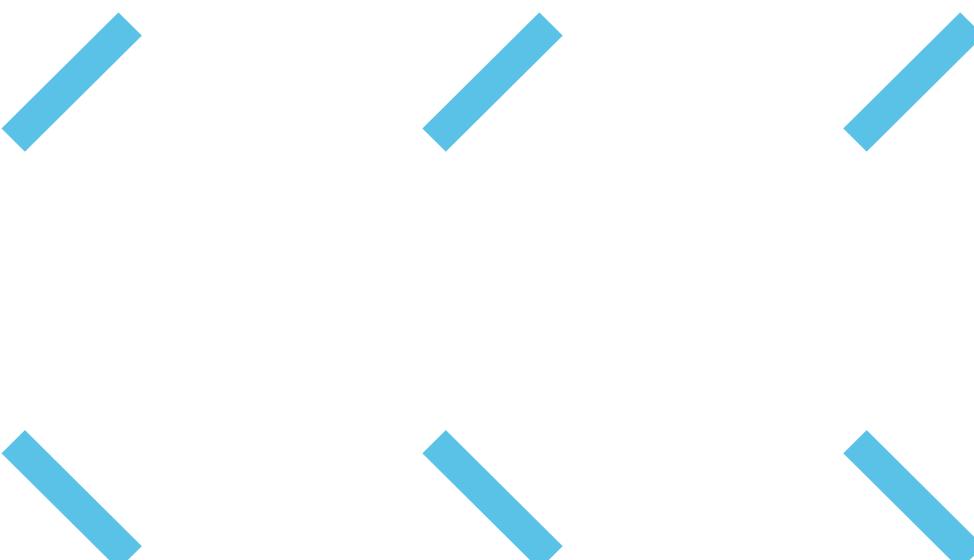
ACTION AREA 3 — LEARNING & TEACHING

Goal

Continuously improve and review course design and delivery, communication and liaison processes, and inherent requirement documents to enable students with disability to succeed as independent learners.

In order to support students with Access Plans, capacity building options and resources for academic staff will be produced and promoted. Academic staff are responsible for implementing recommendations for reasonable adjustments to courses and assessments on behalf of students with Access Plans. Improved awareness and liaison between academics and Accessibility Liaison Officers and promotion of Universal Design for Learning will empower academics to adjust teaching practices to the benefit of students and increase job satisfaction.

Discipline areas are encouraged to produce inherent requirements documents so that students are able to make informed decisions about the non-academic skills required within their chosen course of study and professional education.

Academic staff training and induction will include modules and resources promoting Student Wellbeing Services and universal design for learning to be incorporated over the duration of the AAP.

Learning & Teaching

	ACTIONS	TASK DESCRIPTION	PROJECT PARTNERS
3.1	Utilize the Courses Lifecycle - Inherent Requirements of Study Procedure.	Improve available information about inherent requirements for courses and introduce a process for students to assess their ability to meet the non-academic requirements of courses.	All Deans and Disciplines.
3.1.2		Develop a screening process for Higher Education and VET at admissions stage to assess course suitability.	HE Colleges, Victoria University Polytechnic and Admissions.
3.1.3		Include generic inherent requirements information about non-academic skills required in some professions in Operational Guidelines for Students with Access Plans.	Accessibility Services.
3.2	Co-convene 'Accessibility for Learning' sub-committee.	Establish meeting schedules to progress aims, monitor and report progress to Accessibility Action Plan Working Group.	Accessibility Services and Connected Learning.
3.3	Support College staff with advice about reasonable adjustments.	Where practicable, attend Final Friday meetings and incorporate feedback into Accessibility Services practice.	Accessibility Services, Student Wellbeing Services and Colleges.
3.3.2		Build capacity of Reasonable Adjustments via online training forums and face to face roadshows on all campuses.	
3.3.3		Produce an Accessibility module for inclusion in existing Induction sessions for new teaching staff.	
3.4	Course Coordinator and Course Manager outreach.	Facilitate collaboration between ALOs and Colleges, such as ALOs reaching out to HE Course Coordinators to increase awareness of Access Plans and associated recommendations for Reasonable Adjustments (with cc to College Deans and Directors of Teaching and Learning).	Accessibility Services and HE Colleges.
3.4.2		Facilitate collaboration between ALOs and Course Managers in VUP to increase awareness of Access Plans and associated recommendations for reasonable adjustments (with cc to VUP discipline leaders).	Accessibility Services & VE Centres.
3.5	Support VET Teachers .	LLN scores to be made available to teachers to allow adjustments to teaching methods.	VET Admissions and Course Managers.
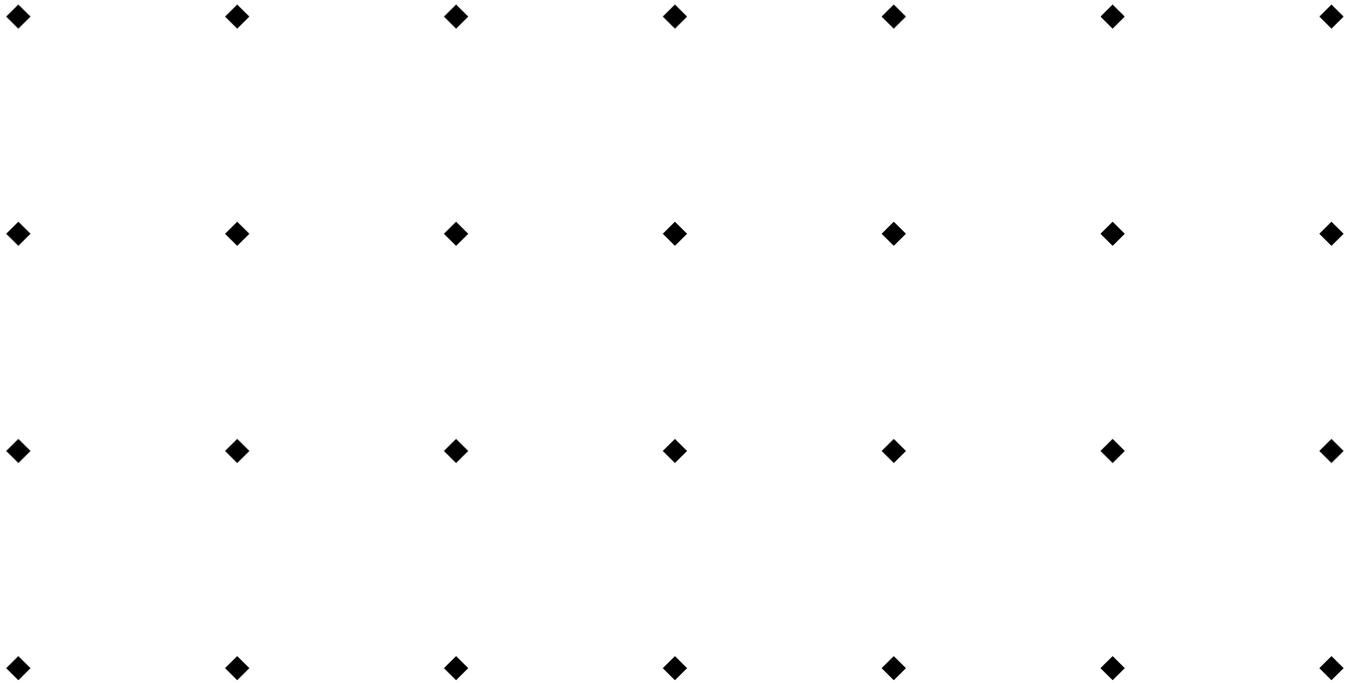
ACTION AREA 4 — DIGITAL INFORMATION & SERVICES (ONLINE)

Goal

Ensure online environments and resources across all areas are accessible to students and staff, and student support systems are integrated to assist liaison between Student Services and Colleges.

In order to meet this goal a range of projects are envisioned to be managed in collaboration with the 'Accessibility for Learning' sub-committee of the Accessibility Action Plan Working Group. To increase accessibility skills and support academic staff, a Discussion Paper on Web Accessibility Indicator (WAI) Tools including a Rectification Plan to increase accessibility of Course Materials will be available for all disciplines. Unit Owners are encouraged to gain the accessibility skills to apply Universal Design principles to course materials, video, images and journal materials in the VU Collaborate space.

Data Base systems will be integrated over time to assist student support and teaching teams to liaise efficiently with academics and other work units. A simpler notification process for Students with Access Plans has been suggested, investigations to be explored and included within the Student Management System - Student One Project.

Web team to continuously improve accessibility of the VU web site.

Digital Information & services (online)

	ACTIONS	TASK DESCRIPTION	PROJECT PARTNERS
4.1	Improve accessibility of course materials on VU Collaborate.	Prepare a Discussion Paper to promote the Web Accessibility Indicator (WAI) Tools, including a plan for remediation of non-accessible course materials for all disciplines.	Connected Learning and Colleges.
4.1.2		Maintain and expand the Accessibility for Learning sub-committee and work to encourage competency for accessibility across the staff and student community.	Members of sub-committee of Accessibility Action Plan Working Group.
4.2	VU webpages (vu.edu.au) is accessible and downloads are available in alternate format.	Encourage all web page owners to upload accessible documents downloads are available in alternate format.	Web team and web page owners.
4.2.2		Accessibility Action Plan 2021-23 document to be uploaded to website in alt format.	Accessibility Services and Web team.
4.3	Advocate for Accessibility skills to be added to VU Student Graduate Attributes.	Encourage all students to acquire accessibility of information skills from online instructions, available on VU Collaborate, to take into the workplace – and there is an expectation for students to produce materials that are accessible.	All students.
4.4	Upgrade software and equipment in Assistive Technology labs.	Students with Access Plans to advise best practice.	Procurement and Accessibility Services.
4.4.2		Facilitate appropriate access to Assistive Technology labs for students.	Accessibility Services and Library.

ACTION AREA 5 – ENVIRONMENT & PHYSICAL ACCESS

> **Goal**
>
> Incorporate best practice to progress modification of existing built environments, facilities and grounds, undertake audits and prioritize access improvements, where practicable.

Introduction of an inclusive process for students and staff with physical disabilities to make direct enquires regarding OHS concerns, Personal Evacuation and Emergency Plans (PEEP), fob passes and other security concerns.

Environment & Physical Access

	ACTIONS	TASK DESCRIPTION	PROJECT PARTNERS
5.1	Improve facilities for students and staff with wheelchairs and other physical disabilities, where practicable.	Maintain and upgrade Accessible Campus maps as required.	Facilities Services.
5.1.2		Install signage on stairs to show the location of nearest lift in all campus buildings.	Facilities Services.
5.2	Promote the PEEP referral protocol.	Work with OHS personnel as required for individual Personal Evacuation and Emergency Plans (PEEP).	Student Services, Accessibility Services and OHS Unit.
5.2.2		Include PEEP referral protocols in VUCollaborate Induction Modules.	Accessibility Services.
5.3	Identify sensory safe rooms on large campuses.	Renovate and furnish 'chill out' rooms for students with Autism Spectrum Conditions and/or mental ill health.	Student Services and Facilities Services.

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