

Access & Equity: What do Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) provide to students with a disability?

Access and equity in training ensures that people with differing needs and abilities have the same opportunities to successfully gain skills, knowledge and experience through education and training irrespective of their age, disability, colour, race, gender, religion, sexuality, family responsibilities, or location. It means identifying and addressing the training needs of each individual.

Under the Australian Government's Disability Discrimination Act 1992 all registered training organisations (RTOs) must identify barriers which people with a disability encounter when accessing programs and services and develop strategies to minimise the impact of these barriers.

A person with a disability has the right to study at an educational institution in the same way as any other student. The *Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) 1992* makes it illegal for an educational authority to discriminate against persons with a disability. A registered training organisation (RTO) may not prejudice and must offer people with a disability the same educational opportunities as everyone else.

The DDA protects people with a disability against discrimination in education, such as:

Admission

- Refusal or failure to accept an application for admission from a person with a disability
- Accepting a person with a disability as a student on less favourable terms or conditions than others. For example, asking a person with a disability to pay higher fees.

Access

- Denying or limiting access to people with a disability. For example, delivering lectures in an inaccessible format, with inaccessible student facilities.
- Subjecting a person with a disability to any other detriment such as discriminatory selection criteria.

Reasonable adjustments

If a person with a disability meets essential entry requirements, the RTO must make changes or 'reasonable adjustments' necessary for that person to perform their course-work.

In most situations, the student with a disability will be able to tell the RTO what he or she needs to be able to study. If necessary, the RTO should also seek advice from disability areas within government departments or organisations that represent or provide services to people with a disability.

Adjustments may include:

- Modifying education premises. For example, making ramps, modifying toilets and ensuring that classes are in rooms accessible to the person with a disability.
- Modifying or providing equipment. For example, lowering lab benches, enlarging computer screens, providing specific computer software or an audio loop system.
- Changing assessment procedures. For example, allowing for alternative examination methods such as oral exams, or allowing additional time for someone else to write an exam for a person with a disability.
- Changing course delivery. For example, providing study notes or research materials in different formats or providing a sign language interpreter for a deaf person.

Unjustifiable hardship

The DDA does not require changes to be made if this will cause major difficulties or unreasonable costs to a person or an organisation. This is called 'unjustifiable hardship'.

Before considering a claim for unjustifiable hardship, an RTO will need to;

- Thoroughly consider how an adjustment might be made
- Discuss this directly with the person involved
- Consult government agencies or organisation that represent or provide services to people with a disability.

March 2018