

Learning together

Further Education Supplement

Introduction

1. Who is this guide for?

This guide is for students with disability in all levels of:

- University
- TAFE
- Vocational Education and Training (VET)
- Community Education (Adult Community Education and similar types of courses)
- Certificates and other courses offered through private training organisations.

2. How to use this guide

This guide is a supplement to the toolkit: [Learning Together – tools to help you get the support you need at school. \(The Learning Together toolkit\)](#)

The *Learning Together* toolkit provides lots of helpful information about

- Your right to education
- How to discuss things like support and adjustments with your education provider
- What to do if things aren't working.

We recommend that you read the *Learning Together* toolkit first, before reading this.

This guide includes some extra things to think about when planning your further education.



3. How to read this guide

The *Learning Together* toolkit is arranged into six parts — and for easy access, we've organised the information in this guide in the same way. These include:

1 Part One — Me and my goals

2 Part Two — Your right to education

3 Part Three — Adjustments

4 Part Four — Communication

5 Part Five — What to do when things are not working

6 Part Six — Legal and advocacy organisations who can help

You might like to keep the *Learning Together* toolkit handy when you're reading this guide.

4. Further education is different to school

As one of the students we spoke to said, there are “differences between school and TAFE or uni about how help is organised and provided”.

This might be the first time that you have spoken to teachers by yourself about what you need to help your learning.

It is important to find out what sort of disability support services there are on your campus, and how you can access them, as well as thinking about some other parts of your further education experience.

Note: We use the term ‘campus’ throughout this guide to cover study at all types of educational institutions (TAFE, university, vocational training, private colleges).

Part One — Me and my goals

What should I think about when choosing my further education?

The words used to describe further education might be different to the words you heard at school.

At school, you studied **subjects**, such as Maths, English, Science and Art, and you probably did exams or assessments in those subjects. A School Certificate or a Higher School Certificate was your long-term goal.

When you are talking about further education at a TAFE, university or vocational institution, you might be looking at **diplomas, certificates, courses or degrees**. These words describe the overall qualification you are working towards — which is your long-term goal.

Within that course or qualification, you have to choose and finish a number of different subjects or units of study. Depending on what you are studying, you might be able to choose all of your subjects, or you might have some that you have to do (called **compulsory**) and some you choose yourself (called **electives**).

Before you enrol in a course, certificate, degree or diploma or other — think about:

- **What do I want to do?**
- **What am I interested in?**
- **What do I like to do?**
- **Why do I want to study? Is it for interest, or because I want a career in that area?**

Talk to people who work in the area you're interested in to find out more. Ask what they studied to get where they are, and consider whether that's something you would like to do as well.

Think about what sort of jobs or careers might suit your disability and your needs going forward.



Part Two — Your right to education

Education is a basic human right for all people, which is protected under national and international law.

Students with disability have the right to be enrolled, be included and be educated on the same basis as all other students.

The *Learning Together* toolkit has more information about your rights, and the *Disability Standards for Education 2005* (the Standards).

The important thing to know is that the Standards and your legal rights apply, regardless of what type of education you're enrolled in – whether it's university, TAFE, VET, community education or something else.

Remember that the definition of 'disability' under the law is very broad and can include a wide range of physical and psychological conditions and illnesses.



Part Three — Adjustments

What is a reasonable adjustment?

A reasonable adjustment is a measure or action to help a student with disability take part in education on the same basis as a student without disability.

Adjustments made for you might also help other students, whether they have a disability or not.

What adjustments have I had before?

While you were at school, you probably had some adjustments in place to:

- The curriculum (what you were learning and when)
- The classroom/learning spaces
- The playground
- Exams and assessments



Think about the course you have chosen, and all parts of it such as classes, campus, online access, and assessments, and ask yourself:

- Do I need the same adjustments that I had at school?
- Do I need new ones?
- Are there some I don't need anymore?
- What does a day on campus look like for me?
- What sort of help might I need to participate fully?
- How can I move between classes and other places around campus like bathrooms, library, student admin offices etc?



What sort of adjustments are possible in further education?

Adjustments will depend on your disability and which course or subjects you are taking.

Some you may be able to organise yourself (like choosing a class at a time of day that works best for your disability), but others you may need help organising.

Part 3 of the *Learning Together* toolkit goes through some examples of adjustments, but here are some extra examples for further education:

Assessment adjustments



- **Extensions of time** — Extra time for all tasks and assessments
- **Alternative assessments** — e.g. individual or small group presentations, written instead of oral assessments
- **Breaking down assessments** — into smaller sections, scaffolding, more explanation about tasks

Exam and quiz adjustments



- Extra time and/or rest breaks, opportunities to stretch if unable to sit for long
- Having food and drink in exams
- Using a computer
- Having a reader or a scribe during exams
- Being in a separate smaller room
- Bringing support materials such as sitting cushions, medication
- Exams to be split over multiple days

Timetable adjustments



- Having your classes in accessible classrooms or lecture theatres with hearing loops, wheelchair access, access to ergonomic chairs
- Choosing classes at certain times of the day
- Having your classes close together to limit your travel
- Class pre-registration if possible

Access to assistive technology or note-taking services like



- Closed captioning
- Speech to text services
- Professional note-takers or note-taking software
- Video or audio recording of lectures or seminars
- Alternative formats for written material
- Auslan interpreter
- Screen-reader accessible materials

Other adjustments



- Access to rooms where you can rest or take medication
- Having your support person attend classes with you for physical support
- Access to closest disabled parking
- Reasonable adjustments to practical placements
- Research support, including support gathering resources

Some tips from students:

“Ask for your adjustments before you need them. It can be harder to get extensions or extra time for exams if you don’t give enough notice. Try and do this at the start of every semester.”

“It can be easier to list all the possible supports and adjustments you might need on your plan, whether you use them all or not. Then you won’t have to ask for extra adjustments at the last minute if something isn’t working.”

“Let your disability support service know as soon as possible if your disability changes and you need further adjustments on top of the ones you already have. They are there to help you!”



Part Four — Communication

Accessing Disability Support

Accessing disability support on campus will be different to accessing disability support at school.

Disability supports and adjustments are usually made through a specialised team who put together a plan, rather than through individual lecturers or teachers.

Disability support services can make a huge difference to your ability to successfully complete your course and enjoy your time on campus. We encourage you to make the most of these services!

The support available will be different at each educational institution, but it needs to be tailored to suit your needs as much as possible.

The following information is general advice about how to access and get the most out of disability support services.



Pre-enrolment

Before enrolling in a course or choosing subjects for each semester, it's also worth considering:

1. If your disability is long-term or permanent, what kind of career is likely to be one that you can manage with your disability?

Note: Almost every job can be done by someone with a disability with appropriate adjustments. However, some jobs have 'inherent requirements' — these are things that you need to be able to do, to do the job. They may be different for each job, and if you can't meet them, then you can't do the job – e.g. you need to have a certain vision level to be a pilot.

2. Will the structure of the course, subjects and assessments be manageable with your disability?

- Look at the course description, including compulsory and elective units
- Look at the course requirements such as assessments and work placements
- Contact the course co-ordinator if you can't access this information
- Compare the course with other universities, TAFEs or education providers to see whether they do things differently, especially when it comes to exams, assessments, semesters or trimesters, and work placements. Think about what would be the best fit for you.

Visit different educational institutions (uni, TAFE, training organisations etc.) and look for signs of inclusive and accessible learning, like:

- Flexible timetabling
- On campus or online class options
- Classes and lectures recorded and made available online, captioned and with variable playback speed
- Multiple formats for course materials e.g. text, video, podcast, slides etc.
- Peer support for learning and social inclusion
- Teachers available to ask questions or give feedback
- Untimed/flexible assessments



Once you're enrolled in a course

Contact your relevant disability support services as soon as possible to discuss your disability and any adjustments you might need.

What to expect from the disability support service on campus:

- 1** Usually **they will give you some forms that your treating doctor(s) will need to complete.** These forms identify your disability, the impacts it may have on your learning and suggestions for reasonable adjustments. You should speak to your doctor(s) about this form and identify any particular areas of concern.
- 2** **Next you'll have a meeting.** In this meeting, someone from disability support services will review your medical information, explain how to access support, and discuss possible adjustments for you.
- 3** After this meeting, **disability support services will create a personalised academic plan.** The plan talks about the impact of your disability on your studies, and the adjustments you need.
- 4** **They may send this plan to all your teachers,** or they may request adjustments without giving information about your disability. Some campuses might ask you to give the plan to your teachers directly.
- 5** **You should ask who will have access to the information** you are providing about your disability.

Consider:

- Can you manage a full-time study load with your disability?
Or would you find it easier to do a part-time load for some of the time?
- Would you prefer to study fewer subjects or units at a time?
- Are there any other adjustments that might help you to learn or participate?

You will need to give information about your disability and think about what supports you might need in the classroom. If you are not sure what you need, look at Part 3 – Adjustments for some examples, and discuss with your disability support services.

Ongoing contact with disability support services

Once you are registered with your disability support service, **you will need to communicate with them regularly** throughout your learning.

They may also contact you to see how things are going, or if you need any further assistance. Make sure you reach out for help if something changes or isn't working. Your disability support service will tell you the best way to contact them. This may be through email, phone, an online form or setting up an appointment time.

You may be required to discuss your plan for each new study period. You should do this as soon as possible (either before the course starts or during week 1) so that disability support services have time to put together your plan.

You may need to **provide updated medical documentation.**



Higher Degree by Research

This sort of post-graduate study has its own set of challenges and opportunities. Here are some extra tips for research candidates:

Before you start

As well as pursuing research that you're interested in, it is important that you find the right research project, supervisor and team to work with.

- Talk to academics in the area you're interested in to find out more, including current or past PhD and Masters research candidates.
- Find a supervisory team that will suit both your academic interests, and your needs

Your right to education

Sometimes, entry processes for higher degrees present challenges for candidates with disabilities. Remember that you have the right to participate on the same basis as other students.

It can be helpful to look for a supervisor who is willing to be your advocate throughout the whole process – from application, to funding, and ultimately completion.



Adjustments

Beyond the adjustments you may have had in the past, there may be some research-specific adjustments you can request.

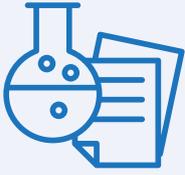
For example:



Scheduling adjustments

- Meetings at certain times of the day
- Presentations at certain times of the day
- Extensions of time for progress or supervisory meetings

Office / lab environment adjustments



- An accessible office
- A quiet space for your desk away from other staff and students
- A separate room to make use of assistive technology or note-taking services
- Ergonomic adjustments to office or lab furniture

Advocacy



- Support persons to attend supervisory or progress meetings
- Assistance with negotiating adjustments between yourself and your supervisor

Communication

The most unique part of the research experience is the supervisory arrangement.

It is important that you establish a clear and respectful line of communication with your supervisor and supervisory team, as they are often responsible for facilitating your accommodations and adjustments.

What to do when things go wrong

Unlike undergraduate study, it's not always clear who to turn to if things aren't working well.

Familiarise yourself with:

- Disability Support Service at your university, as well as
- Conflict resolution processes at the research level.



Part Five — What to do when things are not working

Part Five of the *Learning Together* toolkit explains how to move forward if things are not working.

Here are some extra tips if you're enrolled in further education.

What happens if my teachers refuse my adjustments or if I have any problems?

If you find that your teachers refuse to make the reasonable adjustments set out in your plan, you should contact disability support services immediately.

They can contact your teacher/lecturer and remind them of the legal obligations they have to make reasonable adjustments.

If the problem is not resolved, disability support services may be able to help you make a formal complaint to the university, TAFE or education provider through their internal processes.

What if I disagree with what disability support services suggest?

Firstly, raise the issue in writing, and see whether you can have a meeting to discuss it.

Follow the processes outlined in Part 5 of the *Learning Together* toolkit about how to make an internal complaint.

If you cannot resolve it with your disability support representative, then consider taking it further within that department or above. Find out about the conflict resolution process at your uni or TAFE. Smaller education providers also have conflict resolution procedures to help you if things aren't working.

You may be able to ask the Student Representation body at your campus to advocate on your behalf.



Part Six — Legal and advocacy organisations who can help

For a comprehensive list of legal and advocacy organisations who can help you, see Part Six of the *Learning Together* toolkit.

Advice from other students

We spoke to students with disability who are learning at TAFE, university or something similar. We asked them what worked for them, and what they wish they had known before they started.

“Know your rights and don’t be afraid to ask for what you deserve.”

“Know your strengths and advocate for more opportunities to show these strengths.”

“Casual arrangements work well. I can stretch deadlines as needed without needing to explain specifics to a teacher.”

“Be confident in asking for what you need. Know your rights under anti-discrimination law. Seek out allies from student-led bodies such as student unions/societies.”

“Being well prepared, knowing my stuff makes me feel confident.”





“It’s important to think about asking for help even when things aren’t catastrophically bad.”

“I wish I had known that asking for help isn’t anything to be ashamed of. That finishing uni isn’t a race, it is okay to go part time and do better quality work than to rush to get the degree.”

“I wish I had known that support was available and how to find it.”

“It’s better to talk to disability support services as soon as possible after you enrol, as they can make a huge difference to your ability to successfully complete your course and enjoy your time studying.”

