Creating Accessible Teaching & Support

CATS

CATS

... for students with vision impairment ▶

ABOUT CATS ▶

The Creating Accessible Teaching & Support (CATS) project was funded by the Australian Universities Teaching Committee (AUTC) to improve the quality of teaching and support for students with disabilities. The project has developed resources about teaching and supporting students with disabilities.

During the development of CATS the project team consulted with university teachers, disability practitioners and students, identifying case studies, exemplars of good practice and resources that now form a key part of CATS. The project also identified a range of issues that are faced regularly by staff and students. The CATS project identified the potential for more consistent and systematic approaches to addressing the needs of students with disabilities in universities and for supporting the staff who teach these students. In response to this, we have developed a range of resources that contribute to enhanced teaching and learning support for students with disabilities.

CATS resources include the online **webCATS** and a series of booklets that address the needs associated with specific disabilities. **webCATS** provides information for academics as well as administrators and support staff and has been structured around a series of good practice indicators with accompanying benchmarks. It includes references to a range of useful resources and case exemplars to assist you to maintain and enhance the quality of teaching and support

for students with disabilities. **webCATS** deals with all stages of the student life cycle, from prospective student to graduation, postgraduate study and employment.

This *booklet* addresses the issues experienced by students with vision impairment and the staff who teach them. Suggestions about how to support the learning of students with vision impairment are presented within a broad framework of appropriate action for all disabilities. This booklet is designed primarily for **academics** and focuses on aspects of student academic life, including curriculum design, classroom practice, assessment and interaction between students and teaching staff. The booklet is designed to introduce the more comprehensive information available through the *web resource*, **webCATS**.

Whilst the focus of this booklet is vision impairment, **webCATS** includes more comprehensive information about quality assurance, student diversity, support services, physical access and ICT across all disability areas.

The complete online resource, **webCATS** provides advice on ALL aspects of supporting students with disabilities in Higher Education.

> **webCATS**: http://www.adcet.edu.au/cats

VISION IMPAIRMENT ▶

Vision impairment includes a range of difficulties up to and including blindness. People may be born with reduced sight or may lose all or part of it due to accident or illness later in life.

People are considered legally blind when, with best corrected vision, they are unable to see at six metres a letter designed to be seen by most people at sixty metres. Alternatively, they may have a substantial loss in their central vision or field of vision or a combination of both.

> 3% of the population has vision impairment.

Ninety percent of people who are classified as legally blind have some usable vision. This may range from only perceiving light, to being able to read large print. Vision impairment may include loss of central vision that makes focussing on faces, print or fine detail very difficult. Vision may be blurred, patchy, wobbly or distorted. Reading may be slow and awkward.

Sometimes, peripheral vision is affected. This leads to tunnel vision or a reduced visual field making mobility difficult. People with decreased peripheral vision may not see images immediately to one side of them. They may have difficulty with street curbs, steps or items in their path. Vision also may fluctuate or be influenced by factors such as lighting, light glare, or fatigue. There is no "typical" vision impaired student.

The impact of vision impairment on learning

Some of the ways vision impairment may impact on learning are that students may need:

- to develop effective time management and organisational skills to allow independent study;
- longer time to complete tasks;
- to access information through sound, touch or other media;
- to be provided with information through sound, computer or Braille;
- alternative notification arrangements for provision of information normally posted on notice boards;
- to rely on readers for more immediate text readings;
- to sustain concentration and motivation due to the lack of visual stimuli and the greater time required to access information and produce assignments;
- to have appropriate breaks to reduce eye strain and fatigue;
- to develop advanced auditory memory and listening skills;
- to develop assertiveness and self-advocacy skills;
- to rely on institutions to invest in adaptive technology equipment and software such as closed circuit television, other magnification equipment and scanners; and
- mobility training for the tertiary campus.

> "I didn't realise Tuan was blind until he was in 2nd year and asked me about a particular assignment he was experiencing difficulty getting references for. (The disability unit hadn't managed to get one of Tuan's texts in an accessible format)".

It is against the law to directly **or indirectly** discriminate on the basis of disability.

Disability Discrimination Act 1992:
http://scaleplus.law.gov.au/html/pasteact/0/311/top.htm

RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES ▶

Federal and state legislation has implications for universities in providing for equitable treatment for people with disabilities. Primary among these is the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA) which imposes legal obligations on institutions not to discriminate against people with disabilities.

The DDA aims to:
• eliminate discrimination;
• ensure equal treatment before the law; and
• promote community understanding.

Rights of students with vision impairment

Through the DDA students with disabilities have a **right** to be consulted about their needs and to:
• enrol in courses and programs;
• participate in courses and programs (including relevant supplementary programs); and
• use services and facilities provided by the university, including student support services, on the same basis as those without disabilities.

They also have the **right** to:
• the specialised services without which they would not be able to participate;
• the reasonable adjustments necessary to meet their needs; and
• an environment which is free from discrimination, harassment or victimisation.

Along with all students they also have a **right** to:
• be treated with dignity and respect;
• contribute in a meaningful way to the development and review of institutional policies, procedures and practices affecting their lives; and
• be given the opportunity to develop skills which will enable them to obtain maximum benefit from the educational opportunities available to them.

An example of indirect discrimination

James is a student with vision impairment. He has a prac session which is timetabled for the first floor in one of the heritage buildings in his university. There is no lift and he requests, well in advance of classes, that the prac classes be held in another laboratory. The department informs him that this isn't possible.

The university is at risk of indirectly discriminating against James on the grounds of his disability.

Possible short term solutions
1. Make minor alternations to another laboratory facility that would allow the venue to be changed.
2. Employ an additional demonstrator to work with James in a downstairs lab. However, this would mean that James is unable to benefit from class participation.

Responsibilities of students with vision impairment

Students with disabilities have a **responsibility** to:
• make early contact with the university and be willing to discuss their specific requirements (with assistance if required) and share responsibility in negotiating adjustments that are necessary;
• be proactive in advising institutions of the difficulties they encounter in accessing aspects of the life of the institution; and
• use the services provided in an honest and fair manner.

Responsibilities of staff working with students with vision impairment

Through the DDA, university staff have a **responsibility** to:
• consult with the student (or an associate) to determine what adjustments if any are required and whether any changes are needed during the student's course;
• assess whether a particular adjustment is reasonable and whether there are less disruptive adjustments that would be equally effective;
• make and assess any required adjustments in a timely manner;
• take reasonable steps to ensure that the student is able to enrol, participate in learning experiences and use facilities and services on the same basis as any other student;
• take reasonable steps to facilitate the provision of any specialist services that the student requires; and
• develop and implement strategies and programs to prevent harassment or victimisation of the student.

Rights of staff working with students with vision impairment

University staff have a **right** to:
• maintain the academic requirements of the course; and
• request information about the student's disability and requirements if that information is directed towards providing the adjustment.

"John is doing his PhD in maths. Getting the texts (with their complicated formulae) transcribed to a format which is accessible for him has been a real challenge for us. It's not ideal but providing each chapter as it becomes available has helped... ".

> "I was worried when Jane (a student with a vision impairment) asked for an oral exam, because while oral communication is important, written communication is also a key objective in our course (Media and Communications). I discussed it with disability services staff and the student and we now have agreed on additional time and the use of a laptop".

Towards Inclusive Teaching and Learning ▶

Students in universities today come from a wide variety of backgrounds. For some English is not their first language, for others disability affects their learning. In all classes there are students with different learning styles.

The concept of universal design can provide a starting point for an inclusive approach to learning and teaching.

How can academics maximise learning outcomes for all students?

If universities are to provide students with vision impairment with the opportunity for equitable learning outcomes and a rewarding 'campus experience', the following principles should underpin the development, delivery and evaluation of teaching and services.

- **Inclusive** – teaching and administrative practices must respond to the needs of all students and do so with respect.
- **Comprehensive** – accessibility policy should cover all core activities.
- **Explicit** – clear and realistic strategies and reporting are important. Student and institutional obligations must be made clear.
- **Consultative** – engage students and staff affected in planning and evaluation.

- **Resources** – adequate staff/funds must be available to implement plans, collaborating where appropriate.
- **Systemic** – embedded within planning and quality assurance processes, with a commitment to quality improvement.
- **Owned** – leadership/accountability and commitment must be signalled from the senior executive down.

Meeting students' learning needs

Students with disabilities are an integral part of the academic community and, as such, the quality of the learning opportunities available to students with disabilities needs to be assured in the same way as it is for other students. All institutions face competing demands on their resources. It may appear that the needs of students with disabilities are not central to institutional operations and should therefore give way to issues of 'higher' priority. However it can be argued that the quality of support for students with disabilities is in no small way reflective of the overall quality of support available to all students.

> In 2003 there were 23,855 students with disability in Australian universities (DEST, 2004).

People with disabilities are under-represented within higher education. Poor physical access to buildings has created a barrier for some students, while others have been excluded by inaccessible course materials or teaching methods that do not take full account of their needs. Facilities beyond

the classroom have been inaccessible in some institutions and in others the attitudes of staff may have been less than welcoming.

Institutions that are identified as demonstrating good practice in meeting the needs of students with disabilities tend to share a number of features:

- an ethos that embraces equal opportunities rather than viewing it as an irritation in the pursuit of 'more important' priorities;
- senior managers with an active interest in equal opportunities who take seriously budgetary and other implications of their commitment;
- decision making processes that ensure consideration of the needs of students with disabilities at all levels of the institution.

The social model of disability argues that although individuals may have various impairments, the degree and nature of the disability they experience will be, in part, a product of the arrangements society makes to enable their social, economic and cultural participation.

For example a person with vision impairment who uses a cane to aid their mobility can be completely independent if the physical environment is accessible, teaching practices are inclusive and assistive technology is available. The same person will experience significant disability and may require increased (and costly) personal assistance when the environment is not accessible.

An example

Operating principles to guide academics in their efforts to promote and support cultural diversity in the classroom:

- Respecting culturally diverse approaches to learning and ways of understanding;
- Providing opportunities for all students to reflect on, and express their own sources of cultural influence, as well as the knowledge and experience they bring to the educational environment;
- Encouraging a critical and open awareness of inappropriately ethnocentric, gender-biased language and assumptions and devising effective strategies for managing classroom situations of discrimination and stereotyping;
- Creating an open and inclusive approach to learning from others, and valuing the diversity of perspectives offered in group learning contexts;
- Maintaining a learning environment that addresses the marginalisation or isolation of students on the basis of cultural difference.

http://www.unimelb.edu.au/diversity/CD_T&Lguidelines.html

In other words the 'disability' is an attribute of the social and physical environment rather than the individual. The nature of the disability experienced by the individual can be moderated when environments and practices are designed so as to be inclusive.

CATS

Although there is little that staff in universities can do to change the facts of students' impairments, there is much scope for altering the environment of higher education, which, like any environment, may be more or less disabling. WebCATS aims to minimise the extent to which universities disable the students who study in them.

Practical strategies for teaching students with vision impairments

The DDA requires institutions to take 'reasonable steps' to enable a student to participate on the same basis as a student without disability. In practice, this means that:

1. Curriculum, teaching materials, and the assessment and certification requirements for a course or program are appropriate to the needs of the student and **accessible** to him or her.
2. The course delivery modes and learning activities (including those not conducted in a classroom) take account of the learning capacities and needs of the student and are sufficiently **flexible** for the student to be able to participate.
3. Where a course includes an activity in which the student cannot participate, an activity is offered that constitutes a **reasonable substitute** within the context of the overall aims of the course.
4. Study materials are made available in a **format** that is appropriate for the student and the student is not disadvantaged by the time taken for any conversion that is required.

5. Teaching strategies are adjusted to meet the learning needs of the student and address any disadvantage in the student's learning resulting from his or her disability, including the provision of **additional support** or the development of disability-specific skills.
6. **Assessment procedures** are **adapted** to enable the student to demonstrate the knowledge, skills or competencies being assessed.

The **Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training (ADCET)** provides information about inclusive teaching learning and assessment strategies, accommodations and support services for post secondary students.

http://www.adcet.edu.au/

If you have a student with vision impairment in your class, you might find some of the following strategies useful. The disability service in your university will be an excellent first port of call if you have questions or you need assistance in putting these strategies into practice:

• identify and remove barriers that limit the participation of students with disabilities;
• develop flexible delivery and assessment practices;
• make available study materials in ample time for their conversion to accessible formats eg. captioning of videos (brailling and/or audiotaping of texts, transcription of audiotapes, enlarging print material, tactile drawings of diagrams and conversion to plain English);
• ensure access to technologically based information sources (eg. library catalogue, CD ROM, Internet);
• organise access to appropriate assistive technology and services (eg. scanners, voice synthesisers, braille embossers and voice activated computers);
• invite students to approach you if they have particular learning requirements that can be met through reasonable adjustments;
• anticipate requirements in all aspects of the learning program (eg. ensuring access to field trip and industry sites, ensuring audiovisual resources are accessible to students with sensory impairment, ensuring field/industry placements are appropriate for students with vision impairment);
• check your perceptions of student requirements directly with the students concerned.

The checklists that follow allow institutions to assess themselves against a series of performance indicators in a range of areas related to teaching and learning. In webCATS, self-auditing is facilitated by the provision of an extensive set of performance indicators across all areas of university life.

JAWS speech technology runs under the Microsoft Windows system on PC computers.

http://www.hj.com/

Zoomtext Magnifier/ScreenReader speaks all on-screen text, echoes typing and automatically reads multi-page documents.

http://www.aisquared.com/Products/ZoomText8/ZoomText8.htm

Inclusive course design and review

Inclusive curriculum design benefits all students; however students with vision impairment will be significantly disadvantaged if attention is not paid to accessibility.

Will your curriculum design meet the needs of students with vision impairment?

❏ Curricula are student centered, taking account of individual needs, preferred styles of learning and student choice.

❏ Curriculum design is clearly aligned with learning outcomes which are stated explicitly.

❏ Design is accessible and affords flexibility so that the needs of individual students in a particular cohort can be accommodated.

❏ The specific demands of particular learning experiences, e.g. field work, online and practica, are accommodated in course design.

❏ Design is characterised by the use of varied learning experiences that incorporate an understanding of different teaching and learning styles.

❏ Processes are in place to ensure that students with vision impairment are able to participate in course reviews and evaluations and are included in student evaluation survey samples.

❏ Evaluation and review instruments are designed to include issues of course design, delivery and assessment which relate to the particular needs of students with vision impairment.

❏ Processes are in place to ensure that student feedback is recognised in design, delivery and assessment processes and students are advised of adjustments made in response to their feedback.

Transition to university study

Orientation and transition programs should also take account of the needs of students with disabilities. How does your university's transition program fare on the following checklist?

❏ The university implements, or links to, bridging programs that assist students with disabilities to make the transition to tertiary study.

❏ The university's student induction activities take account of the needs of students with vision impairment, and students and staff involved participate in disability awareness training.

"...I found that people didn't remember that I was vision impaired because I didn't use a cane or have a guide dog. The lecturer kept saying: 'But you can get around uni, so I keep forgetting you need the overheads enlarged.'"

❏ The university provides assistive technology and tertiary literacy skills training.

❏ The university makes explicit the demands of the course, support services available and the skills that students with vision impairment require to successfully complete the course.

❏ The university informs students with vision impairment about the respective rights and responsibilities of students and staff.

Accessible learning resources

Costs of transcribing material into alternative format	
Braille, electronic or a combination of these:	$7,000
Library support (3 hrsx24 weeksx$14 ph)	$1,008
Laboratory support (hrsx24 weeksx$15 ph)	$720
Total	**$8,228**

Students with vision impairment require access to learning resources of a quality and format which allow them to participate equitably with their peers. Does your university provide the following?

❏ Course materials are made available to students in time to allow equitable participation including access to electronic and print resources, books of readings etc.

❏ Material placed on the web is accessible to students with vision impairment.

❏ University mandates timelines for preparation of reading lists to ensure sufficient time for conversion, and processes are in place to convert materials into accessible formats.

❏ Library services including electronic databases are fully accessible to students with vision impairments.

❏ The conversion of learning resources to accessible formats complies with copyright and other legislative requirements.

❏ Opportunities are provided for students to develop the skills necessary to ensure they are able to independently access information following graduation.

PDFs are not accessible to most students with vision impairment. Word or HTML is more accessible

Inclusive course delivery

Does your course delivery take into account the needs of students with vision impairment?

❏ Delivery of the program is as flexible, accessible and inclusive as is reasonably possible.

❏ Reasonable adjustments are made to delivery methods to accommodate the needs of students with vision impairment without compromising the standards or essential components of programs.

❏ Processes are in place for vision impaired students to self-identify to staff on a confidential basis, so that teaching

staff can know and understand the learning implications of any disabilities of the students they teach and make adaptations to delivery that are appropriate and responsive to student feedback.

❏ Staff are aware that a student is using assistive technology and use this knowledge to allow students to take full advantage of the technology.

Inclusive assessment

Inclusive forms of assessment potentially benefit **all** students and reduce the need for and cost of adjustments for those with disabilities.

Inclusive assessment policies and practices provide students with disabilities with the opportunity to equitably demonstrate the achievement of learning outcomes.

Which of the following are in place in your university?

❏ Inclusive forms of assessment and examination arrangements are applied consistently across the institution.

❏ Assessment policies make explicit provision for alternate assessment strategies and there is flexibility in the application of procedures to respond to the needs of students with vision impairment.

❏ The assistive technology requirements of students with vision impairments are accommodated in assessment tasks.

"...I used to dread having to give a presentation as I couldn't tell what the audience thought of the content as I was speaking. It was great that our tutor used feedback sheets from students to provide comments on our talks. I found that these were really useful."

❏ Assessment results and review procedures are accessible to students with vision impairments.

❏ Assessment related information is designed with the needs of people with vision impairments in mind and is available in accessible formats as required.

What sort of adjustments can be made to assessment?

When making adjustments to assessment it's important that the changes don't interfere with desired learning. Providing alternative assessment does NOT mean providing unfair advantage.

Depending on course objectives and learning outcomes, the following assessment adjustments may allow students with vision impairment to compete on equal footing:

• use of a separate venue or alternative date or time of examination;
• additional time in examinations or an extended deadline for assignments;
• use of assignments instead of examination;
• short-answer examination instead of multiple choice examination;
• different styles of assessment which vary question and response modalities (eg. oral exam or audiotaped or videotaped answers); and
• use of computers, amanuenses (people who take dictation) or readers and other support in examinations;

Accessible learning environments

Does the physical and psychosocial learning environment of your university facilitate equitable participation by students with vision impairments?

❏ Timetabling arrangements ensure that there is enough time between classes to enable students with vision impairments to travel between them.

❏ All learning environments and technologies are accessible to students and staff with vision impairment.

❏ Teaching staff actively promote a culture which values diversity and does not tolerate harassment or discrimination.

❏ All staff and students are aware of equal opportunity rights, university policies and responsibilities under legislation in relation to disability discrimination.

❏ Teaching staff anticipate and respond to any specific safety requirements related to participation by students with vision impairments.

❏ Staff constructively manage behaviour related to disability which impacts upon others in the class having a view to vicarious liability for actions by others.

A good practice example
(Suggestions from an academic at University of Technology, Sydney)

Beyond legislative requirements there are teaching and support strategies that represent good practice:

• use teaching practices that anticipate a diverse student body, including those with disabilities;
• handle requests from students with disabilities in an appropriate and timely manner;
• set aside personal views as to a student's likelihood of gaining employment in the relevant field with disability; and
• adjust assessment methods and timeframes to enable students with disabilities equal opportunity for academic success.

Staff members can also reasonably expect:
• to be treated with respect; and
• to be provided with support and expertise when required.

What about postgraduate students?

There are increasing numbers of students with vision impairments undertaking postgraduate study. It is important that postgraduate policies, practices and procedures provide students with vision impairments with the same opportunities as their peers to successfully complete coursework and research programs.

• Research students receive the support and guidance necessary to secure equal access to research programs.
• Postgraduate promotion and recruitment strategies actively encourage participation by students with vision impairments.
• Application and selection processes are **non-discriminatory**
• Supervision policy identifies the responsibilities of the supervisor in relation to the diversity of students, and training includes consideration of the learning needs of and appropriate responses to students with vision impairments.
• Supervisors and students negotiate alternative research methods that accommodate the needs of students with vision impairments.
• Where physical access is impossible or unreasonably difficult, imaginative approaches to enabling alternative means of participation are implemented, eg relocating classes to more accessible spaces.

What about international students?

International students with disability considering study in Australia must show they can pass a medical examination. Of particular concern to the medical examiner is the ability of the student to be able to complete their studies. If the student has disability, the medical examiner is required by law to consider whether this disability is likely to be a financial burden on the Australian community.

"I wanted to take part in the student association elections but I wasn't able to access any of the voting materials".

In addition, all international students require medical insurance and if coverage is not available (for example because of a pre-existing disability) students must satisfy the medical officer that they have sufficient resources to meet the costs of their medical expenses. The Australian Migration Act (1958) indicates that failure to disclose a pre-existing disability not identified by the medical officer may result in the visa being cancelled. Once a student visa has been granted, and the student enters the Australian jurisdiction, all the provisions of the DDA (1992) are available to that student in the same way as to an Australian citizen.

This means that universities cannot refuse admission to international students on the grounds of disability unless the university is able to demonstrate that to support the student would result in unjustifiable hardship to the university. Universities must provide adequate support services for such students following their arrival in Australia but these should not be funded using resources allocated to the university by the Government for domestic students or through an additional charge to the individual student.

Implications for university administration

The DDA requires universities to take reasonable steps to ensure that a student with disability is able to participate and use facilities and services, on the same basis as a student without disability. It also requires universities to develop and implement strategies and programs to prevent harassment

or victimisation of students with disability. Specifically universities must:

• enable a prospective student to seek admission to and enrol in the university without undue difficulty;

• make information that addresses the needs of students with disabilities accessible to them in a range of formats within a reasonable time frame in a way that enables them to make informed choices about course choice and progression;

• consult with the student, review her/his course in the light of this information and implement any reasonable adjustments required. In making adjustments, universities should maintain the integrity of the course and assessment requirements and processes;

• provide additional support to the student where necessary, to assist him or her to achieve intended learning outcomes; and

• inform staff and students about the obligation not to harass or victimise students with disabilities; the appropriate action to be taken if harassment or victimisation occurs; and complaint mechanisms available to a student.

When considering an adjustment for a student with disability, a provider is entitled to information about the student's disability and individual requirements if that information is directed towards:

• providing the adjustment, including assessing the nature

and extent of the adjustment needed and assessing the provider's capacity to provide the adjustment; and

• an assessment that is intended to clarify the student's ability to comply with any non-discriminatory requirements of a course or training program.

Any confidential information provided to education providers for the purposes of making adjustments should not be disclosed except for the purposes of the adjustment or in accordance with a lawful requirement.

Example of a policy for improving accessibility of information: http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/ellp/downloads/pdf/improve.pdf

DISABILITY LEGISLATION ▶

webCATS provides a range of resources on all the issues outlined previously. Other first ports of call are the Teaching and Learning Centre and Disability Services in your university. The information outlined below provides additional information on relevant policy and legislation as well as some print and web resources.

The Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

The DDA uses a very broad definition of disability and defines discrimination in terms of less favourable treatment or less favourable consequences. The Act covers direct and indirect discrimination in most areas of life in Australia.

Section 22 of the DDA prohibits discrimination associated with enrolment in or admission to university. This also includes an environment conducive to learning or extra-curricular activities. This may necessitate making reasonable adjustments to teaching practices or environment.

Discrimination in education is not unlawful if the person requires adjustments which would impose unjustifiable hardship on the educational institution. Whether the adjustments required by a student with disability pose unjustifiable hardship for an educational authority will depend on the circumstances of the case.

It is also unlawful for educational authorities to refuse to admit a person with disability to a course on the basis

that a person with disability is unlikely to be able to work in the profession or trade because of his or her disability. Qualifying and vocational bodies may refuse to authorise or qualify a person with disability if, because of the person's disability, he or she is unable to carry out the inherent requirements of the trade or profession. The educational institution should not pre-empt the decisions of the qualifying body.

Disability Standards for Education

The proposed Disability Standards are subordinate legislation to the DDA, and education providers must comply with them. They aim to clarify the legal obligations in relation to education. If an education provider acts in accordance with the standards, they are deemed to have complied with the Act.

The standards include:

• rights of students in relation to education and training;

• responsibilities of education providers; and

• measures which, if implemented, will be evidence of compliance and provide a defence against litigation.

However the measures may not cover all eventualities and compliance with them may not be sufficient to prevent discrimination. Compliance with the measures is also not required if legal obligation can be met in other ways.

The Standards are accompanied by Guidance Notes which are intended to assist in interpreting them.

Want to know more about the Disability Standards?

http://www.dest.gov.au/research/publications/disability_standards/default.htm

Some definitions...

Disability

Under the DDA and the proposed Disability Standards for Education, disability in relation to a person means:

• total or partial loss of the person's bodily or mental functions; or

• total or partial loss of a part of the body; or

• the presence in the body of organisms causing disease or illness; or

• the presence in the body of organisms capable of causing disease or illness; or

• the malfunction, malformation or disfigurement of a part of the person's body; or

• a disorder or malfunction that results in the person learning differently from a person without the disorder or malfunction; or

• 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 disability that:

• presently exists; or

• previously existed but no longer exists; or

• may exist in the future; or

• is imputed to a person.

Adjustments

An adjustment is a measure or action taken to assist a student with disability to participate in education and training on the same basis as other students. The need for an adjustment and the nature of an adjustment should be determined in consultation with the student or their associate. This might include consultation on whether there is any other adjustment that would be no less beneficial for the student but less disruptive and intrusive for others. In providing reasonable adjustments for a student with disability, it is good practice for an education provider to ensure that the processes for seeking an adjustment are accessible and transparent.

Reasonable Adjustments

An adjustment is reasonable if it takes into account the student's learning needs and balances the interests of all parties affected, including the student with the disability, the education provider, staff and other students. Factors to take into account in assessing whether a particular adjustment for a student is reasonable include:

- the nature of the student's disability;
- the effect of adjustment on the student, including the student's ability to participate in courses or programs, achieve learning outcomes and operate independently; and
- the costs and benefits of making the adjustment.

A key aspect of the process for making an adjustment is that the education provider is required to consult the student or their associate on the appropriateness of the adjustment. The decision must include consideration of whether there is any other adjustment that would be no less beneficial for the student but less disruptive and intrusive for the student and for others. It may be necessary to seek professional expertise in deciding on an adjustment.

The provider must take reasonable steps to ensure that any required adjustment is made within a reasonable time. In making a reasonable adjustment, the provider is entitled to ensure that the integrity of the course or program and assessment requirements and processes are maintained.

Unjustifiable Hardship
There are two stages to the process of determining whether there is unjustifiable hardship.

1. An assessment of the adjustments the student requires.

2. An assessment of the effect or likely effect of the student's disability on the educational authority and its staff, other students and the student with disability or his or her associate, including:

- any benefits the adjustment may have for other people (eg. flexible teacher methods to accommodate students with disability may enhance learning for other students);
- any disadvantages the adjustment may have for others (eg. a student with learning disability may require more teaching resources which detract from the resources available for other students).

The costs involved in making the adjustment take into account the financial situation of the educational authority - for example, the cost of providing a modified computer for a person with a vision impairment may be beyond the financial resources of a small secretarial training college but is a minor expense for a university.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES ▶

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) provides comprehensive information about the Disability Discrimination Act and practical guidelines for reducing discrimination.
http://www.hreoc.gov.au

Blind Citizens Australia provides links to a range of useful resources for blind and vision impaired people in Australia.
http://www.bca.org.au

Towards Success in Tertiary Study is a series of guides for students with a range of disabilities including vision impairment, who are currently studying, or intending to study in higher education.
http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/ellp/publications/towards.html

Making Learning Materials Accessible for Vision & Hearing Impaired Students - University of New England.
http://www.une.edu.au/tlc/disabilities

Providing Learning Support for Blind or Visually-impaired Students Undertaking Fieldwork and Related Activities - Geography Discipline Network.
http://www.glos.ac.uk/gdn/disabil/blind/ch1.htm

Strategies for teaching students with vision impairments (Maths).
http://www.as.wvu.edu/~acad/mvision.html

Strategies for teaching students with vision impairments (Science).
http://www.as.wvu.edu/~scidis/vision.html

The Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training (ADCET) provides information about inclusive teaching learning and assessment strategies, accommodations and support services for post secondary students.
http://www.adcet.edu.au

DO-IT: Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking and Technology.
http://www.washington.edu/doit