



Sharon Kerr

~~dis~~Ability in Higher Education

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Global Access Project to higher education for students with print disabilities

Global Access Project is an initiative of the Higher Education Consulting Group

globalaccessproject.com

Today's presentation will:

1. Provide an introduction to Global Access Project outlining who we are and what we are doing.
2. Report on what we are finding in the higher education sector with regard to the support of students with a print disability.
3. Highlight opportunities that the Round Table may be interested in addressing.

GAP is located in Sydney Australia

Our senior team have extensive global experience in the Higher Education Sector with **over 50 years combined experience working in Universities, TAFE's and Schools**



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David Wright – Previous Vice President Macquarie University – **Business background** - Founding CEO of One.Tel Networks, T3, Slice Wireless, Monitoring Division Inc & HECG



Sharon Kerr – Previous Manager Macquarie University Accessibility Service – **Education background** – online education, curriculum development, teacher training, lecturing, school teaching.



Kylie Colvin - Previous Chief of Staff to three VC's at Macquarie University – **Analytics and Operations background** – strategic planning, policy and governance, communications.

GAP provides :

Consultancy to universities, TAFE's and private colleges;
Customised conversion services;
Information and toolkits; and
Conducts reviews, planning and developing playbooks.

Professional development to teaching, support and administrative staff.

Subjects include universal design of curriculum, teaching and supporting a diverse student cohort.

We deliver training either in seminars and/or through our online learning management system.

All PD is customised to meet organisational requirements.

What are we finding in the higher education sector with regard to supporting students with a print disability?

Let's first look at Universities:

Major shift away from a focus on supporting students with a sensory or physical disability to supporting students with mental health issues, resulting in:

1. A change in the profile of disability support staff in universities – (more likely to be psychologists or health workers than accessibility specialists);

2. A shift away from resourcing for alternative formats towards counseling; and

3. Little institutional awareness of accessibility – (e.g. widely held view that all ebooks are accessible.)

4. Students are more often than not told what formats they can request, rather than asked what they need;

5. Large Print is in the main no longer needed or requested and

6. Braille is rarely offered.

7. While technologies are being relied on as the access solution for inaccessible learning environments, few universities provide these for students or have any expertise in advising students about what is available

Now for TAFE's:

With the introduction of Smart and Skilled to the TAFE system, there have been major changes impacting on students with a print disability.

We are seeing that with the introduction of high course costs many institutes have :

1. Experienced large declines in the numbers of students with a disability enrolling;
2. Decline in enrollments has triggered cycles of change management , resulting in the loss of key support workers with accessibility and alternative format expertise;

3. Some states such as NSW have now responded by removing all charges for students with a disability – resulting in increased enrollments of students with a disability in institutes with lower capacity to meet student needs.

4. TAFE's are increasingly moving into the space that was traditionally the domain of universities offering degrees, attracting international students, developing and delivering courses online.

Finally, private colleges.

There are now over 4,500 private colleges in Australia.

These Registered Training organisations (RTO's) are offering qualifications ranging from Certificate I to Post Graduate Qualifications.

Though some of these colleges have 30,000+ students we are finding:

1. Little to no understanding of the needs of students with a print disability.
2. It is not uncommon to hear that colleges have just told students to go elsewhere.

3. Heavy reliance on the “unjustifiable hardship clause” in the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 and Education Standards 2005 for not making an adjustment.

4. Adjustments often do not include alternative formats;

5. Teaching staff are subject specialists often without formal education qualifications.

Now for the opportunities for Round Table:

1. The sector is looking for standards – but is mostly unaware of the standards developed by the Round Table.

2. We are no longer dealing with an environment where there are specialist support workers. For this reason standards need to be presented in a format that will be easy for people who have no knowledge of print disabilities to understand.

3. While the legal compliance imperative has worked overseas, it has not worked in Australia. There is a need for advocacy in this area especially with the appointment of the new Disability Discrimination Commissioner.

4. It is important in this environment that those advocating for access to education for students with a disability who require adjustments work together. We need to collaborate with other groups and feed information into bodies such as ADCET. www.adcet.edu.au/

4. We need to be creative in how we approach community education and awareness of the needs of students with a print disability— perhaps by giving awards for education providers who are providing accessible education and good support for students. Remembering that with life-long learning – we are all potentially students.

5. We need to ensure that our membership has up-to-date information on assistive technologies and is aware of what is available. This is especially important as people start receiving their personal plans through the NDIS.

NDIS does not support employment or education, however if people need these technologies for daily communication and functioning they are covered.

6. For those working in universities, TAFE's and colleges, it is important to advocate for strategies such as universal design of curriculum to minimise the demand for adjustments and again have creative solutions such as employing students with a print disability to do end user checking.

Questions ... discussion

Final thought:

Assistive technologies, universal design of curriculum and conversions of inaccessible materials are the three pillars for access. It is up to us to ensure that all three are implemented.

Thank you 😊
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