# Universities Accord – Deakin University, Student Access and Inclusion contribution

This submission is made on behalf of the Access and Inclusion team (including the Disability Resource Centre) at Deakin University. We have addressed questions 28-32 from the University Accord Discussion Paper. These questions most closely align to our work of supporting students with Disability or who are carers for those with Disability.

# 3.5 Creating opportunity for all Australians.

## 3.5.1 Academic preparedness

### Q28 What is needed to increase the number of people from under-represented groups applying to and prepared for higher education, both from school and from other pathways?

**Current state:**

* In Victoria, VTAC Category 3 SEAS applicants (students with a disability, health or mental health condition) continue to increase despite total SEAS applications decreasing. Category 3 applicants have increased at a compound annual growth rate of 8%. This is at its highest level in five years despite total SEAS applications decreasing in 2022/23 across all categories (data supplied from VTAC)
* Domestic Deakin Students with Disability have lower success rates (-5.4%) compared to Deakin students without disability (data supplied by SIPU)
* Deakin have implemented Peer Support and Mentoring programs for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactive Disorder (ADHD), based on significant increases in student disclosures. These programs attempt to address gaps in preparedness for newly enrolled students. However, students often do not engage in these programs until sometime into their studies further decreases their chances of successful progression.

**What is needed:**

* Allocate funding to extend support offerings to equity cohorts prior to enrolment, specifically students with Disability (E.g. Category 3 SEAS applicants). This would allow for targeted and specialised support programs for students with Disability to ensure their preparedness for higher education. Outreach school programs (currently funded by HEPP) need to increase knowledge of university support offering, such as disability services, for prospective students.

### Q29 What changes in provider practices and offerings are necessary to ensure all potential students can succeed in their chosen area of study?

**Changes necessary:**

Strategy and Plans

* Ensure the Disability Access and Inclusion plans are given prominence in each institution and includes outcomes related to Teaching and Learning. Particularly curriculum development, assessment delivery and student learning outcomes.

Policy and Procedure

* Inclusion practices and [Universal Design principles](https://www.adcet.edu.au/disability-practitioner/course-design-and-implementation/universal-design) are embedded in policy and procedures at institutions to ensure students with starting point of disadvantage have equitable access to Higher Education. Embedding these principles will decrease the need for individualised adjustments requests for the student and, therefore, decrease additional work requirements for staff.

Inherent Requirements

* Ensure course Inherent Requirements are developed with relevant stakeholders (for example, Disability Practitioners) and student consultation.
* Ensure Inherent Requirements and their use within identifying reasonable adjustments are accessible to, and transparent for, students and consistent with [Disability Discrimination Act](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00125)  and [Disability Standards for Education 2005](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2005L00767) as recommended in [The Role of Inherent Requirement Statements, Final Report, 2016](https://ltu-figshare-repo.s3.aarnet.edu.au/ltu-figshare-repo/28850589/146408_BrettM_2016.pdf?AWSAccessKeyId=RADjuIEnIStOwNiA&Expires=1678943853&Signature=m9d20EofRTNH9Uznbc4jCsP7fgE%3D)
* Build a nationally recognised Inherent Requirements framework to be followed by providers to ensure diverse learners and avoids risk of discrimination.

Academic and professional staff

* Academic and professional staff are trained, prepared, confident and supported in developing offerings using inclusive practice to ensure students from a range of equity groups. Staff also require appropriate resources to draw on to ensure best practice.
* Time allowance for Academic staff included into work practices.
* This can be achieved by onboard equity training for staff to build knowledge of relevant [Disability Standards for Education 2005](https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005) and to include KPIs based on inclusion and access within performances appraisals.

Support offerings

* Increase funding to extend support offerings to students with Disability pre, during and post study. For examples, Academic and Peer support programs and meaningful employment support for students with Disability.

## 3.5.2 Addressing barriers to access

### Q30 How can governments, institutions and employers assist students, widen opportunities and remove barriers to higher education?

**Current state:**

* In 2022 Domestic Deakin students with Disability comprised 14.4% of all Domestic students. Up from 6.1% in 2014. Similar increases have been seen across the sector.
* Deakin had 4,500 students registered with the Disability Resource Centre in 2022 up from 1,548 in 2014 (Data supplied from the Deakin Disability Resource Centre). This is a 190% growth in demand over 8 years when compared to all domestic student increase of only 13.5% in the same period.
* Deakin academic staff were sent 19,177 individualised student Access Plans in 2022, up from 8,600 Access Plans in 2019. This significantly increases the workload for academic staff.
* The Deakin Disability Resource Centre currently has a Disability Advisor to Student ratio of 1:511, up from 1:310 in 2014. General sector best practice is 1:250.
* Domestic Deakin students with Disability have lower success rates (-5.4%) compared to students without Disability (data supplied by Deakin Strategy and Planning Unit)
* Alarmingly domestic Deakin students with Disability have lower overall employment rate (-8.9%) and lower full-time employment rate (-15.4) compared to students without Disability (data supplied by Deakin Strategy and Planning Unit)

This year-on-year growth is unsustainable, and students may not get the meaningful and timely reasonable adjustments needed from their institutions as obligated under the [Disability Standards for Education 2005](https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005) and [Disability Discrimination Act](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2018C00125). The flow-on impacts on success rate and employment outcomes for Students with Disability needs to be addressed with the following.

**Government assistance:**

Despite huge increases in enrolments the funding available via the [Disability Support Fund](https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/F2022L00347) has not increased to reflect the change. This national fund remains under $8 million in 2022 which is allocated across all institutions (compared to over $140 Million of HEPP funding, which cannot be allocated to students with Disability as an equity group). Therefore, institutions may not adequately support students with Disability once a student is enrolled. In short, the Government can assist by:

* Increase institutional funding via the Disability Support Fund (or equivalent stream) for students with Disability to better reflect high enrolments from this cohort.
* Ensure [Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training](https://www.adcet.edu.au/) (ADCET) is appropriately funded on an ongoing basis.
* Establish a national tutorial network for Higher Education students with Disability similar to the Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme to ensure success rate increase.

**Institution assistance:**

* Partner with students, rather than consult with students.
* Institutions commit to [Universal Design principles](https://www.adcet.edu.au/disability-practitioner/course-design-and-implementation/universal-design) across Teaching and Learning, physical and digital spaces and within policy. Embedding these principles will remove barriers to education and decrease the need for individual adjustments.
* Provide academic and professional staff disability training and knowledge building specific to student equity cohorts.
* Increase support for students from equity groups to engage in Work Integrated Learning opportunities to address the significant employment outcome gaps for students with Disability.
* Specific programs and greater collaboration with employers to address poor graduate outcomes for students with Disability.

**Employer assistance:**

* Increased collaboration with institutions to ensure specific cohorts (including students with Disability) are supported to transition into meaningful careers based on their study.

### Q31 How can the costs of participation, including living expenses, be most effectively alleviated?

**Institutions:**

* Review and redesign course requirements to allow for flexibility and consideration for those that require it. Particularly for courses that require face to face workshops or unpaid placement.
* Decrease the burden of proof for a student to get an accommodations or flexibility.
* Expand the criteria for supports ie. Equity plans for study not limited to disability or elite sport

**Government:**

* Subside first year of Higher Education
* Reassess the ‘full time and part time’ study requirements to allow for students to maintain employment and a study load that is achievable.
* Re-evaluate the need for ‘independence’ to receive Centrelink payments
* Expand the funding for institutions support programs for students at risk of disengagement (ie. housing, food, study equipment).
* Reassess rate increases on HECS.

## 3.5.3 System-Wide approaches to increasing access and equity

### Q32 How can best practice learning and teaching for students from under-represented groups be embedded across the higher education system, including the use of remote learning?

**Current state:**

* Deakin domestic students with Disability have an overall satisfaction rate (- 3.4%) lower compared to students without a disability.

**Change to embed best practice:**

* Institutions adopt and commit to [Universal Design principles](https://www.adcet.edu.au/disability-practitioner/course-design-and-implementation/universal-design) across Teaching and Learning, physical and digital spaces and within policy. Embedding these principles will remove barriers to education and decrease the need for individual adjustments.
* Mandate Digital Accessibility [compliance](https://www.w3.org/TR/WCAG21/) and ensure institutional procurement is in line with current standards : [Accessible IT Procurement (caudit.edu.au)](https://caudit.edu.au/accessible-it-procurement/)
* Partner with students from equity groups during course design to ensure Access and Inclusion is embedded in Teaching and Learning practices. Eg SWAT team and Students as Partners at Deakin University
* Appropriate funding to support students learning remotely to ensure skill development, retention, success and satisfaction.

## Q33 What changes to funding and regulatory settings would enable providers to better support students from under-represented groups in higher education?

* Regulate benchmarking of data collection across the sector. The true support costs of is not being reflected.
* Promote diversity and quality through the second by allocating funding according to student demand as recommended in the [Bradley Review of Australian Higher Education in 2008](https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2008-12/apo-nid15776.pdf) (Recommendation 31). Some 15 years later the student demand is in no way being met by funding for those with Disability.