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Accessibility Manager's Guide



Accessibility at RMIT

As a University and community, RMIT is committed to providing an equitable experience for all staff, students and visitors with disability by removing barriers and creating opportunities to enhance inclusion and ensure full and effective participation.



What is disability?

Disability includes any physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments that may change the way you work and interact. One in five people in Australia, almost 4 million people, have a disability and this proportion is increasing with an ageing population. We may all be touched by disability at some point in our lives.

The Disability Discrimination Act (1992) states that disability is any impairment, abnormality or loss of function of any part of the body or mind, including:

- **Physical**—muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy
- **Intellectual**—typically classified by an IQ of 70 or lower
- **Mental illness**—bipolar, depression, schizophrenia
- **Sensory**—vision or hearing impairment
- **Neurological**—epilepsy, cerebral palsy, brain injury, Tourette's
- **Learning disability**—dyslexia, ADHA
- **Physical disfigurement**—someone with a physical disfigurement may be treated differently or excluded because of how they look
- **Immunological**—can include cancer and HIV

The United Nations Convention on the rights of Persons with Disabilities adopts a social model of disability and defines disability as:

"Persons with disabilities include those who have long term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others".

This definition takes a societal approach, which means that it looks at the interaction of an individual's impairment and the societal barriers that are present in our workplaces and communities that can prevent an individual with disability from participating equitably.

For example, if the only way to access a meeting room is via a flight of stairs then a wheelchair user wouldn't be able to participate. This isn't due to their disability, rather it is the barrier (in this case the stairs) that is preventing participation.

A social model perspective does not deny the reality of impairment nor its impact on the individual. However, it does challenge the physical, attitudinal, communicative and social environment to accommodate impairment as an expected incident of human diversity.



What does disability look like in Australia?

- Over 4 million people in Australia have some form of disability. That's one in five people.
 - 18.6 per cent of females and 18.0 per cent of males in Australia have disability.
 - There are 2.1 million Australians of working age with disability. Of these, just over 1 million are employed and another 114,900 are looking for work.
 - The likelihood of living with disability increases with age. Two in five people with disability are 65 years or older.
 - 35.9% of Australia's 8.9 million households include a person with disability.
 - 639,300 people with disability used mobility aids. Only 4.4% of people with a disability in Australia use a wheelchair.
 - 45% of Australians aged 16–85 years experience a mental health condition during their lifetime.
 - 34% of people with disability are managers and professionals.
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Why accessibility matters

RMIT values the richness of diversity among staff and recognises the contribution already being made by those working with disability.

Strengthening our accessible and inclusive environment will enable RMIT to:

- taps into a wider talent pool
- encourages greater retention levels
- uphold the rights of people with disability
- demonstrate fairness and equal opportunity

How can we help?

At RMIT, we're focused on the person and not the disability. We want to remove any physical, technological, attitudinal and social barriers so that we can build an inclusive culture and flexible and accessible workplace environment that considers and welcomes every individual's needs.

RMIT has a team dedicated to removing barriers and personalising work for individuals with disability. The Accessibility at Work team consists of subject matter experts across ITS, Property Services and HR including Health, Safety & Wellbeing. They coordinate cross

functional activities to focus on ensuring that work adjustment requests from staff with disability are prioritised.

For more information, support and advice contact the Accessibility at Work team at **hr.assist@rmit.edu.au**



Opportunities and support

Here are just some of the ways in which we can help staff who choose to identify with a disability.

If you would like to suggest other meaningful ways in which we can help please contact the Diversity & Inclusion team at **diversity.inclusion@rmit.edu.au** or **hr.assist@rmit.edu.au**

- Workplace adjustments that remove physical and technological barriers
- Confidential access to the Accessibility Work Team
- Passport that carries workplace adjustment requirements into future teams
- Professional development and social networking opportunities



Australian Network on Disability

The Australian Network on Disability (AND) is a national, membership based, for-purpose organisation that supports organisations to advance the inclusion of people with disability in all aspects of business.

RMIT is a silver member of the Australian Network on Disability and participated in the inaugural AND Index, creating a benchmark to accelerate actions to improve the experience of staff and students.

As an AND member, we are partnered with PACE Mentoring and Stepping Into Internships, which are programs that connect

jobseekers with disability to mentors and leading Australian businesses where they can gain work experience and expand their networks.

If you or someone you know would be interested in taking part in these programs, please contact **diversity.inclusion@rmit.edu.au**

Equitable learning services for students

Equitable Learning Services (ELS) provides support and equal opportunities for students with disability, long term illness and/or mental health conditions and primary carers of individuals with disability.

If you manage staff who need to be aware of these student services, take a look at what is available at **<https://www.rmit.edu.au/>**

[students/support-and-facilities/student-support/equitable-learning-services](#)

Workplace adjustments

A workplace adjustment is a change to a work process, practice, procedure or environment that enables staff with disability to perform their job in the most effective way. RMIT recognises the importance of making reasonable work adjustments relating to illness, injury, disability and balancing work, life and family needs.

Many staff with disability may not need any workplace adjustments, while others may need only minor changes or adjustments

to their work hours or the performance requirements of the job.

Types of workplace adjustments

- Accessible premises
- Assistive technology
- Adjustments to communication styles
- Workstation accommodation
- Flexible working hours
- Psychological support
- Supervision
- Ergonomic equipment
- Auslan/captioning
- Job design

Workplace adjustments passport

The RMIT Workplace Adjustment Passport form documents any completed adjustment to eliminate or minimise barriers at work for employees with a disability. It allows for seamless continuity and review of such arrangements at RMIT. All information is confidential and provided on a voluntary basis.

Recruitment

- Creating an inclusive workplace begins before you've even hired staff – it begins when writing job descriptions and placing a job ad. Focus on outcome-focused language in the job description and make sure the ad is in an accessible format.
- Give all candidates who progress to the interview stage a heads up about the interview style and what to expect (e.g. online tests, printed materials, practical tasks) so they can voice any access requirements in advance.
- Remember that potential candidates with disability may respond to behavioural interview questions with examples that are non-work related, but are still equally relevant in demonstrating their experiences and capabilities.
- When on boarding, if workplace adjustments have been requested, try to put them in place before the new staff's first day.
- Assess on-boarding procedures to ensure all staff are able to participate successfully, especially with accessing digital forms and information.
- It could be helpful to provide new staff with a 'buddy' within the team who is available to answer questions and help the new colleague settle in, so new staff feel like they have another trusted person to turn to with any questions or concerns. Just keep in mind confidentiality requirements when briefing the 'buddy'.

Interview questions

The types of questions you can lawfully ask in an interview include:

- Whether any adjustments are required to ensure a fair and equitable interview/ selection process.
- How the person will perform the essential requirements of the job.
- Any adjustments that may be required to complete the essential requirements of the job.

Don't ask questions about:


- How a person acquired their disability
- Details of their disability, including the name of the type of disability.
- How the disability will impact their ability to perform aspects of the role.
- Anything where the information obtained is to be used for the purpose of discrimination.



Retention

- Check in with staff to ensure that the adjustments you've made are working or to discuss further modifications. It's fair to extend the probationary period so you can assess performance after adjustments have been implemented.
- After putting a workplace adjustment in place, consult with staff on how they would like to ask colleagues to do things differently so they can be fully included.
- Staff may acquire a disability during their working life through accident, illness or ageing. Take the opportunity to discuss how things are going at work for all staff and ask if there are any adjustments that you can facilitate to help them.

Career Development

- Encourage all staff, including those with disability, to reflect on their workplace goals and identify the necessary steps to achieve them.
 - Set regular dates to review workplace adjustments and opportunities for development and keep open communication. Remember everyone is different, so don't assume that what's worked in the past for someone else will be equally effective for another team member.
 - Ensure that training opportunities are barrier free so all employees can participate.
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What can you do to support an inclusive experience?

- Remember that disability is unique and the impact is different for every person. The best approach is to ask staff about their needs and preferences, including workplace adjustments and safety procedures, and avoid making assumptions.
- Use person-first language that emphasises the individual, not their disability or impairment.
- Only refer to a person's disability when necessary and appropriate and refrain from asking how a person acquired their disability.
- Use common expressions. It's ok to say 'see you later' or 'did you take a look at that document?' to a person who is blind or has low vision.
- Be considerate of the extra time it might take someone to respond or perform an activity.
- If you feel like you've embarrassed someone then acknowledge it and apologise, but don't dwell on it or keep apologising.
- If you are in a situation where you are unsure how to respond, ask the person how you can be helpful. This is the best way to create an open, transparent environment and build trust. It's ok if you don't know what to do – just don't be afraid to ask.
- When issuing invitations to meetings or events extend the commonly asked question about diet to include access, e.g. 'do you have any dietary or accessibility requirements?'
- When planning and hosting meetings consider the accessibility of the venue, wayfinding and signage, and accessibility features of your material including use of inclusive language.



Inclusive communication

The key to inclusive communication is emphasising the individual through people-first language, instead of focusing on the disability or impairment. It's important to use phrasing that doesn't let the person's disability overshadow their individual identity and capabilities.

Language is critical to inclusion, and how we speak to and about one another influences how we treat one another. Research demonstrates that inclusive cultures are high-performing cultures – we are more driven to contribute and succeed when we feel we are appreciated for our unique contributions, and that we belong within the organisation and our immediate working teams (Catalyst, Inclusive Leadership: The View From Six Countries, 2014).

The best strategies for inclusive communication with or about people with

disability include:

- focusing on the person, not the disability.
- avoiding language that implies people with disabilities are victims, or are inspirational simply for living with disability. Describing someone as a 'sufferer' or 'victim' paints them as powerless. A good general rule is to avoid any language that frames disability as a limitation.
- thinking about whether referring to a person's disability is relevant (in most cases, it will not be).

Inclusive communication	Wording we <u>don't</u> recommend
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Person/people with disability/disabilities ▪ People living with disability ▪ People with lived experience of disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disabled person/people ▪ Differently abled ▪ Physically challenged ▪ Someone who can't (hear, speak, walk)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ People/person without disability/non-disabled person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Able-bodied ▪ Normal
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Person who uses a wheelchair ▪ Wheelchair user 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Wheelchair-bound ▪ Bound/confined to a wheelchair
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Person with low vision ▪ Person who is blind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The blind ▪ A blind person ▪ Person without sight ▪ Vision impaired
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Person who is deaf ▪ Auslan user ▪ Hard of hearing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The deaf ▪ A deaf person ▪ Mute
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Intellectual disability ▪ Learning disability 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Slow learner
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mental health issues ▪ Person with mental illness ▪ Person with lived experience of mental illness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mental health problems ▪ Mental ▪ Mentally-ill
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accessible toilet ▪ Adapted toilet 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disabled toilet
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Accessible parking space 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Disabled parking
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Has ▪ Experiences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Suffers from



Behaviour and body language

- Always ensure that you speak directly to the person, and not to anybody else who may be accompanying or assisting them (e.g. interpreters).
- When meeting with or speaking to somebody who uses a wheelchair, it's a good idea to choose a location where you can sit down too, so that you can put yourself at the same level as the person.
- Always ask the person before giving assistance.
- Never handle or touch a person's assistive device without permission.



Digital accessibility

- If you are creating content for the RMIT website, familiarise yourself with the Web Accessibility Policy. This covers the University's standards for ensuring that web content can be accessed using assistive technology (such as screen readers), and that visual content can be perceived and understood by all visitors (via captions on images, subtitles and transcripts for videos, etc).
- Simple things like ensuring text is a reasonable size and that there is a high level of contrast between text and background can make a big difference to a person with low vision.
- Check overall accessibility of Word documents by selecting 'Tools' and then 'Check Accessibility'.



Further information

For additional information and resources, please head to: **rmit.edu.au/staff/our-rmit/diversity-and-inclusion/accessibility**

Here you will find further information with links that cover details of:

- The Workplace Adjustment Policy Process
- The Accessibility at Work Team for Staff
- Equitable Learning Services for Students
- Campus Mobility Maps
- Professional Development Opportunities
- Shared stories from staff experiences
- The Australian Network on Disability
- Digital accessibility
- Government Services



How to connect with us

The Accessibility at Work RMIT team consists of subject matter experts across HR, ITS and Property Services who provide a priority service to staff requiring additional support

due to a variety of circumstances – illness, injury, disability and/or balancing work/life/family needs. Contact them via emailing **hr.assist@rmit.edu.au**

Acknowledgment

This manager's guide was created by RMIT's Diversity and Inclusion team in Human Resources. RMIT thanks Australian Network on Disability (AND) for the support, collaboration and resources provided to create this guide to advance the inclusion of staff with disability.