

# KNOW YOUR STUDENT

FACT SHEETS TO GUIDE THE  
LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT  
OF STUDENTS WITH SPECIFIC NEEDS



## Physical disability

### Definition

Physical disability is the total or partial loss of a person's bodily functions (i.e. walking, gross motor skills, balance etc.) and/or total or partial loss of a part of the body (i.e. a person with an amputation).

A person's mobility may be impaired either on a permanent, temporary or episodic basis as a result of: amputation, arthritis, cerebral palsy, multiple-sclerosis, muscular dystrophy, paraplegia, post-polio syndrome, quadriplegia or spina bifida. A learner whose physical disability results in reduced mobility range has a mobility impairment.

### Impact on training and assessment

There is a broad range of physical disability and resulting implications for learners. Some learners may have mild impairment with minimal effect on their access to, participation in and outcomes for education. Others may have severe impairment and experience more significant challenges. Each learner is different and any particular condition may vary in severity.

Learners with a physical disability may have difficulty with:

- speech;
- access to buildings, transport, resources and amenities;
- absences due to ongoing commitments to rehabilitation or treatment programs, hospitalisation;
- fine and gross motor control, for example inefficient handwriting, difficulties manipulating resources;
- fatigue related to the increased level of exertion required to access facilities and perform day-to-day tasks.

### Delivery and assessment strategies

The following strategies are suggestions. Each student with a physical disability will have their own individual support and learning needs and it's recommended as a first step, that you ask them and/or their family or support network (if such a network is present and accessible) what the best ways to support their learning is.

When liaising with anyone other than the student directly, ensure you maintain confidentiality, as per TAFE Queensland Privacy Policy.

## **Presenting and communicating information**

- If the learner uses a wheelchair, ensure they have an easily accessible space in the training/tutorial room, but be conscious of highlighting this need to other students, and/or pushing them to sit in a certain place, without access to their peers.
- Give plenty of notice when there is a change of venue / access.
- Give the student space and independence and take guidance from them regarding any help or support they may need. Many students with a physical disability are quite used to negotiating their environment and support needs and could find too much focus or attention on their disability to be disadvantageous.
- Provide flexible delivery of training material e.g. electronic media as learners may have unexpected absences due to medical appointments.
- Take time to understand those with speech difficulties.
- Negotiate with learners on an individual basis regarding practical activities.
- Do not automatically assume that the learner requires assistance. Ask first and consider the learner's personal space.
- Consider additional time for learners with mobility difficulties.

## **Utilising technology to maximize student engagement**

- A reader/scribe can assist learners with reading and writing material.
- Learning materials and information can be converted into formats that are accessible for the learner e.g. audio files (such as MP3 format), Braille (a tactile reading and writing code, which is read using the fingers) or large print.
- Screen reading software such as Job Access With Speech (JAWS) reads electronic material aloud to the user. It provides audible access to electronic information, software applications and the internet.
- Electronic magnification devices are available in portable, transportable, desktop and laptop based forms. They magnify or scan print based materials and objects.
- Magnification software (e.g. Microsoft Magnifier, ZoomText) enlarges the whole computer screen including text and application buttons / navigation.
- Anti-glare screens and reducing the brightness or changing the contrast of computer screens can benefit.
- Audio recording of training delivery or note taking (a person or digital note taker such as the Neo Notetaker) to assist learners with handwriting difficulties and / or with mishearing and misquoting.

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- Connect (also referred to as Desire2Learn) has numerous options to increase accessibility to information provided within Connect. Options such as screen readers, keyboard-only navigation, colour contrast accessibility features and zooming options are all available within Connect. Educators can access information about these options at <https://connect.tafeqld.edu.au/shared/help/student/content/en/Accessibility.html>.
- A Disability Coach or Disability Support Worker can assist the learner with planning and organizing. The benefit to requesting a Disability Coach/Support Worker is that they may be able to look holistically at the support and learning needs of the student and provide some helpful ideas regarding software, or education strategies to help increase the student's understanding, participation and engagement.

## **All of the delivery strategies may be of assistance for assessment**

- Additional time may be required to complete assessments and tests.
- Ensure there is sufficient access to assistive devices and technology to complete assessment requirements and that additional time is provided to delivery oral presentations when necessary.
- Identify and discuss alternative formats with the learner prior to assessment such as oral presentations.

## **References**

- The Physical Disability Council of NSW, <http://www.pdcnsw.org.au/>
- TAFE Queensland, <https://connect.tafeqld.edu.au/shared/help/student/content/en/Accessibility.html>

## **Further Resources**

- Australian Disability Clearing House on Education and Training (2016), <http://www.adcet.edu.au/>
- Maltron Keyboards (2016), <http://www.maltron.com>
- James Cook University (2016), <https://www.jcu.edu.au/accessability-services/strategies-to-support-a-student-with-a-physical-condition>