

## Disability and Special Needs Student Support Services Policy and Procedure HEPP71

### PURPOSE

1. Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education) will ensure that access to learning resources does not present unexpected barriers, costs or technology requirements for students, including for students with special needs and those who study off campus.
2. This policy outlines the Institute's responsibilities and support services that ensure that students have access to learning support services that are consistent with the requirements of their course of study, their mode of study and the learning needs of student cohorts, including arrangements for supporting students with disabilities, psychological or physical.
3. The policy identifies the personnel, process and forms applicable to the rendering of '**equitable learning services and plans**' for students requiring special study assistance.
4. It is important that the student advise the Institute staff of their disability or special needs at the time of enrolment, so that accommodation of such needs may be made in advance of course commencement and for the duration of the course.

### SCOPE

This policy covers the whole Institute community, including staff, students, and stakeholders. This policy applies to:

1. education (teaching and learning, enrolment, student management, student services, curriculum development and delivery); and
2. the provision of specialised goods and services in support of students who present with special study needs and/or a disability that may affect study and course progression.

### DEFINITIONS

Assistive Technology	Any technology, whether hardware or software based, that may assist the student with reading, writing, listening, accessing course materials and lectures and aid course progression.
Disability Services and Support	The support mechanisms are available and accessible, in all academic, psychological and physical aspects, in support of students who present with disabilities or special needs relevant to study and course progression.
Equitable Learning Plan	A (primarily) academic plan that gives structure to the special assistance and support services that have been assigned to and in support of the student with special needs and/or disabilities. It is an agreement between the Institute and the student, with responsibilities for both parties.
Reasonable Adjustment	A term to describe the extent and scope of course and assessment modification the academic and campus management are required to accommodate.
SCEI-HE	Southern Cross Education Institute (Higher Education)

### POLICY

1. SCEI-HE assures students that regardless of disability or special needs, each student will have free and easy access to all facilities, floors, lecture theatres and educational resources required for full participation and successful progression through and completion of their enrolled course. This includes digital resources compliant with Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.1 for online and blended learning environments, such as captioned lecture recordings, screen-reader-compatible documents, and accessible learning management systems.
2. Additionally, and importantly, SCEI-HE enables reasonable adjustments to be made to assessment procedures for people with special needs, such as people with disabilities or with language or literacy difficulties.
3. Under the *Disability Standards for Education 2005*, education providers must make reasonable adjustments for people with a disability, to the maximum extent that those adjustments do not cause that education provider unjustifiable hardship. While 'reasonable adjustment' and 'unjustifiable hardship' are different concepts and involve different considerations, they both seek to strike a balance between the interests of education providers and the interests of students with and without disability.
4. The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* includes a very broad definition of disability, including illness or disease, past

disability and present disability. Students could have a range of disabilities or inconveniences such as:

- 4.1 Learning disabilities;
  - 4.2 Sensory impairments (including vision, hearing or speech impairment);
  - 4.3 Physical or mobility impairments;
  - 4.4 Psychological or psychiatric impairments (or mental illness);
  - 4.5 Disabilities, such as cerebral palsy or head injury, which may result in multiple impairments;
  - 4.6 Medical conditions such as HIV or AIDS, cancer, or chronic fatigue syndrome (which may result in multiple disabilities);
  - 4.7 Intellectual disability; and
  - 4.8 Being the primary carer for an individual with a disability.
5. Disclosure of a disability is the choice of the student and is not a requirement for participation in an accredited course of study. Any information about a student's disability is shared and decisions about reasonable adjustment made collaboratively with the student, trainer, campus or training manager and SCEI-HE Counsellor. Consideration in the decision-making process will include students' special needs such as:
- 5.1 Writing;
  - 5.2 Reading;
  - 5.3 Hearing;
  - 5.4 Communicating with others or getting ideas across;
  - 5.5 Moving or manipulating objects;
  - 5.6 Paying attention / staying on track;
  - 5.7 Sitting for long periods;
  - 5.8 Moving around the learning environment;
  - 5.9 Remembering / retention; and
  - 5.10 Dealing with frustration.
6. Support Services and Special Learning Accommodation may include:
- 6.1 Orientation and Training**
    - 6.1.1 Disability-specific orientation sessions to introduce students to support services, assistive technologies, and campus facilities, integrated into general orientation programs;
    - 6.1.2 Staff training on disability awareness and inclusive teaching practices to ensure consistent implementation of accommodations;
  - 6.2 Adjustments to Your Study Conditions**
    - 6.2.1 Course materials in other formats: If you have trouble reading printed material, we can provide your course materials in another format;
    - 6.2.2 Note takers and other assistance staff;
    - 6.2.3 Additional writing or reading time in exams;
    - 6.2.4 Someone to write or read for you;
    - 6.2.5 The use of a computer;
    - 6.2.6 Your exam paper in a different format;
    - 6.2.7 A private room for your exam; and
    - 6.2.8 Ergonomic furniture.
  - 6.3 Assistive Technologies**
    - 6.3.1 When registered with a disability or as a special needs student, SCEI-HE can:
      1. Discuss which technologies are most suitable for your issue;
      2. Show you how they work; and
      3. Assist in acquiring the technologies.
    - 6.3.2 There are a range of technologies that may assist, in the case of reading, writing or listening difficulties:
      1. **Dragon speech recognition software;** if you have difficulties typing and writing. It converts speech to text; the computer 'types' what you say into a Word document. This allows you to use the computer with minimal use of keyboard or mouse.
      2. **Claro Read;** if you have difficulties reading print materials. It reads electronic text to you in a life-like voice. Additional features can assist you with reading and writing tasks.
      3. **Zoom Text;** if you have low vision or disabilities that make it difficult to view information on computer screens. It increases the size of text and information on your computer screen, reads text aloud to you in a life-like voice and changes the contrast and enhances other commonly used features on computers to make screens easier to read.

4. **Furniture;** ergonomic furniture may be an option if the student has short or long term physical special needs.

#### 6.4 What SCEI-HE Cannot Provide

It is beyond the resources of SCEI-HE to provide the applicant with:

- 6.4.1 Case management for medical, professional counselling or physical disabilities;
- 6.4.2 Taking on an advocacy role in relation to individual grievances;
- 6.4.3 Support that substitutes teaching and learning (e.g., private tutoring); and
- 6.4.4 Personal care.
- 6.4.5 SCEI-HE will provide referrals to external organizations, such as disability support agencies or mental health providers, for services beyond its scope, with clear guidance on accessing these resources.

#### 6.5 Evaluation of Support

The effectiveness of Equitable Learning Plans and reasonable adjustments will be monitored through regular student feedback surveys, consultations with the SCEI-HE Counsellor, and annual reviews to ensure ongoing alignment with student needs.

#### 6.6 6.6. Support for Students with Disabilities from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Backgrounds

- 6.6.1 SCEI-HE recognises that students with disabilities who are also from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds may face additional, intersectional barriers to participation and success in higher education.
- 6.6.2 In accordance with the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2021, Standard 2.2 (Diversity and Equity), the Institute is committed to providing equitable access to learning through the provision of translated materials and culturally appropriate support services.
- 6.6.3 Students with disabilities from CALD backgrounds will have access to:
  - Translated core learning materials where required, and
  - Culturally sensitive counselling or support services to address both linguistic and cultural needs.
- 6.6.4 The Student Support team, in consultation with the counsellor, is responsible for coordinating the provision of these services.
- 6.6.5 Students requiring translated materials must notify the Student Support team via email or by self-disclosure as early as possible, preferably at the time of enrolment.
- 6.6.6 Where existing translated materials are not available, the Institute will arrange for professional translation of core learning materials through an accredited service.
- 6.6.7 Translation services will be initiated no later than ten (10) working days prior to the commencement of the study period, where the student's needs are disclosed and confirmed in advance.
- 6.6.8 Students can expect to receive translated materials within two (2) to three (3) weeks of the confirmed request, depending on the length and complexity of the materials.
- 6.6.9 Where culturally sensitive counselling or support services are required, the Student Support team will provide access to internal counsellors with relevant cultural training or refer students to external culturally competent providers.
- 6.6.10 All reasonable efforts will be made to ensure that support is provided in a timely, respectful, and culturally appropriate manner.

### PROCEDURE

#### 1. Steps Toward an Equitable Learning Plan

- 1.1 SCEI-HE treats every case relating to reasonable adjustment individually.
- 1.2 The steps toward accommodating Equitable Learning needs are:

##### Identification and Registration

- 1.2.1 Students may initially inform SCEI-HE of their disabilities through SCEI-HE Counsellor and by identifying the disability in the *Application to Study Form*. Information about support services will be provided in accessible formats, including large print, audio, and Braille, upon request;
- 1.2.2 The student will then make an appointment to see SCEI-HE Counsellor or assigned Equitable Learning appointed staff, to guide the student through the forms and processes that will lead to an Equitable Learning Plan for the duration of their course;
- 1.2.3 Once the student's disability or special need is identified, the student will complete an *Equitable*

*Learning Registration Form*. This form formalises the request for special consideration and support services outlined in 'Policy' above, and helps align the student's needs with staff relevant to the procurement of equitable learning technologies, personnel and/or support technologies. The form asks for information about your disability or special needs from your health practitioner, for confirmation, detail and advice regarding how SCEI-HE may assist;

- 1.2.4 SCEI-HE commits to regularly reviewing the student's support needs in consultation with the student and relevant staff. This review ensures that support remains appropriate and effective throughout the student's enrolment and may be initiated at key academic milestones or upon request by the student or staff.
- 1.2.5 Academic support staff will develop an Equitable Learning Plan for the student, based on the needs identified and confirmed in the *Equitable Learning Registration Form*. This plan includes any reasonable study adjustments that the student may require.

#### **Procurement and Approval**

- 1.2.6 Once approval of assistive technologies, hardware and/or academic assessment modifications have been authorised by the relevant Management staff, based on review of the *Equitable Learning Registration Form*, the Student Financial Accounts Manager will review the request with the Campus Manager;
- 1.2.7 If authorised by the Campus Manager, Student Financial Accounts will make the recommended purchases;
- 1.2.8 If the Equitable Learning Plan recommends adaptive study and assessment design, then final authority rests with the Academic Director, who will test alignment of the adaptive study and assessment design with the accredited Learning Outcomes of the course;

#### **Potential Privacy Issues**

- 1.2.9 It is not mandatory that the student divulges their disability to SCEI-HE, but if they do, the *Privacy Policy HEPP34* applies;
- 1.2.10 The student only needs to inform SCEI-HE of the special needs or disability if it might negatively impact their studies and quality of learning experience if they do not; and
- 1.2.11 SCEI-HE staff are subject to the *Information Privacy Act 2000* and the *Health Records Act 2001*.

## **2. Mental Health Supportive Services for all members of SCEI-HE community**

- 2.1 SCEI-HE Counsellor will provide emotional support for all staff and students with a disability or special needs support;
- 2.2 SCEI-HE Counsellor will guide students with disabilities and special needs through the forms and processes that will lead to an Equitable Learning Plan for the duration of their course; and
- 2.3 SCEI-HE Counsellor will have a referral system in place for students who are in need of further, professional, external mental health care.
- 2.4 SCEI-HE will offer proactive mental health initiatives, such as workshops and awareness campaigns, to promote wellbeing across the student cohort;
- 2.5 To ensure consistent support, SCEI-HE will maintain a backup counsellor or external referral system in case the primary counsellor is unavailable.

### **ACCESSIBILITY**

Students are encouraged to advise SCEI-HE Counsellor of any difficulty they find in accessing the classrooms, toilets and general built environments associated with attending classes. The following accommodations exist at sites registered for Higher Education course delivery:

#### **1. Floor Access**

- 1.1 There are elevators operating between each floor.
- 1.2 Wheelchair ramps are provided.

#### **2. Toilet Facilities:** Ambulant toilet facilities are fitted.

#### **3. Kitchen Facilities:** Student Kitchen facilities are provided for students and staff.

### **RELATED DOCUMENTS**

Application to Study Form HEFOR16  
Equitable Learning Registration Form  
Privacy Policy HEPP34

## LEGISLATIVE CONTEXT

Disability Discrimination Act 1992  
Disability Standards for Education 2005 <https://www.education.gov.au/disability-standards-education-2005>  
Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)  
Information Privacy Act 2000 (Vic) <https://www.legislation.vic.gov.au/as-made/acts/information-privacy-act-2000>  
National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018, Standard 8 (Specifically 8.22.1)  
Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 <https://www.legislation.gov.au/C2011A00073/latest/text>

## RESPONSIBILITIES

### Academic Director

- Accountability for the process of Disability and Accessibility Support Services, in line with the Threshold Standards.
- Development, compliance monitoring and review of this policy and any associated procedures and guidelines.

**Counsellor:** Sourcing of suitable services and/or staff that may assist. Providing mental health support services. Coordinating disability-specific orientation and proactive wellbeing initiatives.

### Course Coordinator

- Accommodation of special study and assessment (academic) needs to the specific course of study.
- Development, compliance monitoring and review of this policy and any associated procedures and guidelines.

**Student Financial Accounts:** Finance approval, purchase and allocation of identified resources.

**Quality Assurance and Compliance Unit:** Consulting with students with disabilities during policy reviews to incorporate their perspectives.

## DOCUMENT AND RECORD CONTROL

Created	Sep 2019 (V1.0)
Amended	May 2020 (V1.1); Feb 2021 (V1.2); Feb 2022 (V1.3); Feb 2024 (V1.4); May 2025 (V1.5)
Last reviewed by	Quality Assurance and Compliance Unit (May 2025)
Last approved by	Academic Board (June 2025)
Version	1.4
Effective date	June 2025
Next planned review	April 2027