

2020 Disability Standards for Education Review Submission
Disabilities Department, University of Melbourne Student Union

The Disability Standards for Education 2005 seek to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as students without disability. While we very much appreciate the available disability resources and support at the University of Melbourne, we nevertheless consider that they fall short of the Disability Standards for Education to varying degrees. Moreover, concerns similar to ours were raised over five years ago that has yet to receive a response from the government.

The current resources devoted to students with disabilities' education access and facilitation needs are unfortunately inadequate. At the University of Melbourne, students with disability report waiting several weeks to receive assistance. There is also a lack of customised programs for students with disability such as in vital areas such as careers advice; a widely fluctuating awareness amongst staff of the impact of less visible disabilities; no images of visible disability in the University's marketing materials (with the notable exception of the Melbourne Disability Institute); and a general undercurrent of ableism.

Some of the concerns that we have in terms of support services are echoed in the 2014-2015 evaluation by KPMG of the *Higher Education Disability Support Program (DSP)*, a program that provides important funding so that universities meet their obligations with respect of the Disability Standards for Education. The KPMG report was released over 5 years ago but has yet to receive a response from the government. The KPMG report noted that "students in many institutions felt that disability staff were overworked and inaccessible due to their workload. Students described difficulties getting appointments to see disability support staff" (KPMG 2015, p.29). Only 55% of students surveyed by KPMG thought that higher education 'mostly' or 'completely' assisted students to overcome barriers to receiving a university education, although two-thirds of students 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that their university was providing them with the educational support and/or equipment needed with their studies (KPMG 2015, p.25). It also observed that there was a lack of programs to improve staff disability confidence, awareness-raising, or to attract and retain students with disabilities.

We recommend that the KPMG's findings with respect of the DSP are responded to and that they are implemented. We also recommend that the funds for the DSP are significantly increased to better meet the needs of students with disability, and that they are linked to student enrolments not CPI to retain their financial vigour over time.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our submission.

Emma Townsend (September 2020)

On behalf of the Disabilities Department, University of Melbourne Student Union.

Reference:

KPMG (2015). *Department of Education and Training Evaluation of Disability Support Program: Final Report*

https://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/dsp_evaluation_report_final_june_2015.pdf

accessed 14 September 2014.