

FIJI NATIONAL UNIVERSITY DISABILITY INCLUSIVE POLICY 2016

Background

The Fiji National University (FNU), was established through Decree 39 of 2009. Its objective is to serve the needs of the post-secondary educational requirements of the people of Fiji. The University also promotes scholarship, research, free inquiry, and academic excellence, and in this process creates, disseminates, maintains, and advances knowledge by teaching and other means, for the welfare and needs of all communities.

FNU is concerned with education and training at the post-secondary levels, including technical and vocational education, consistent with international standards of teaching, research, and other academic activities in institutions styled as institutions of higher learning.

As well as being the premier university in Fiji, FNU will endeavor to serve as a regional hub for higher education and Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) in the Pacific.

The provision of equal access and opportunities for persons with Disabilities is specifically addressed in Core area 1, objective 2, initiative 6 (1.2.6) of the strategic plan 2020. It specifically states that the University will endeavor to “increase access for students with learning disabilities and difficulties by providing disability resource services for students” by the year 2020. The provision of support services to persons with disabilities is a collaborative effort where all the Support Divisions and Colleges of the University need to work together and take an active role in consultation as well as and the incorporation of these measures into their policies and procedures.

1.0 POLICY STATEMENT

This Policy is aligned to support the Fiji National University’s (hereafter referred to as “FNU”) vision of creating a learning, working, social and physical environment that ensures inclusiveness and equal opportunities in the instructive and work practices of persons with Disabilities.

FNU is dedicated to supporting and implementing the principles of the:

- (i) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)²
- (ii) INCHEON strategy to “Make the Right Real” for Persons with Disabilities in Asia and the Pacific, 2013-2022; and
- (iii) Fiji National Disability Policy 2008-2018.

FNU is steadfast in its dedication to take suitable steps to warrant that its responsibilities are observed in a way that inspires the independence of persons with disabilities and which challenges and reduces discrimination against such individuals.

² <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

As FNU is principally an institution of instruction and research, it is apt that this Policy looks in detail at the area of education and identifies ways in which persons with disabilities can be supported to gain access to, and contribute to, the same quality of education which is available to persons without disabilities. However, as FNU is also an employer and supplier of many other amenities, it is similarly fitting that these areas be encompassed in the Policy.

FNU's Disability Inclusive Policy is aimed to reinforce existing practices by exclusively understanding the significance of disability issues in the University's Policies and procedures. In addition, the Policy includes the provision of support and reasonable Adjustments to enable persons with disabilities to demonstrate their abilities, fully participate in University activities and realize their individual objectives and potential.

2.0 PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to reaffirm FNU's obligation in providing an environment that nurtures inclusiveness and accessibility in education and employment for persons with disabilities.

3.0 SCOPE

This Policy will encompass all the Colleges and Support Divisions of FNU.

4.0 POLICY OBJECTIVES

This Policy aims to:

- 4.1** cultivate, educate and support behaviour amongst FNU students and staff towards persons with disabilities;
- 4.2** encourage staff to develop their disability expertise to enable them to assist with the learning and occupational support requirements of students and staff with disabilities;
- 4.3** provide the means to support accessible working and learning milieus, including assistive devices and know how's and/or reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities;
- 4.4** guarantee courses and programmes offered are kept at the highest quality and that they are available to all students with disabilities;
- 4.5** enable FNU to include in its preparation, the principle of universal design, that is, inserting in the design of the course, employment, amenities and physical environment, the ability to provide access to a variety of users, inclusive of persons with disabilities;
- 4.6** cultivate equal opportunities to persons with disabilities in areas such as employment, education, political, cultural and social activities within FNU; and
- 4.7** encourage positive, educated and objective behaviour towards individuals with disabilities through training and staff development programmes.

5.0 DEFINITION

For the purpose of this Policy, disability is defined in the context of the convention on the rights of persons with disabilities which states) that³. “Persons with disabilities include those who have a short or long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”.

Taking into account that many regard disability as a physical attribute, the following are also considered and are adapted from the Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (amended 2009) of Australia⁴.

Disability means:

- (i) total or partial loss of an individual’s bodily or mental capabilities; or
- (ii) total or partial loss of a part of the body; or
- (iii) the existence in the body of entities which bring about illness; or
- (iv) the existence in the body of entities capable of causing illness; or
- (v) the failure or deformity of a part of an individual’s body; or
- (vi) a condition or malfunction that results in the individual learning differently from an individual without the condition or malfunction; or
- (vii) a disease that affects an individual’s thought processes, insight, emotions or decision making ability or that results in troubled behaviour. It also includes a disability that:
- (viii) currently exists; or
- (ix) formerly existed but no longer exists; or
- (x) may exist in the future because of a genetic predisposition to that disability; or
- (xi) is attributed to a person.

6.0 DISCLOSURE and CONFIDENTIALITY

6.1 FNU encourages persons with disabilities to divulge the type and degree of their disability on their application, admission and/or enrolment forms with the Human Resource Division, Academic Office as well as the Office for Disability Services. It is the responsibility of the student or staff, upon enrolment or commencement of employment, to register with the Disability Services immediately upon cognizant of their disability and in a timely manner that permits the University to best provide for their needs.

³ <http://www.un.org/disabilities/convention/conventionfull.shtml>

⁴ <https://www.comlaw.gov.au/Details/C2015C00252>

6.2 The University is absolved from any liability in the event where the student or staff fails to disclose their disability during the admission, enrollment or selection process.

6.3 The form of disability must be corroborated by current and relevant medical documentation. A student or staff shall seek advice from the Office for Disability Services to decide the documentation that is suitable to their circumstances.

6.4 Information provided by students or staff with regards to their disability or their associate's disability, shall remain private and shall be restricted to those with a need to know basis in accordance with the Privacy provisions under FNU HR Policy 29.

6.5 Persons with disabilities are not obliged to disclose their disability unless they feel that they will need reasonable adjustments or additional support to be able to fulfill their academic or employment obligations.

6.6 For a student or staff with disabilities who does not register with the Office for Disability Services and decides later on that he/she will need additional support, the University will not be obligated to provide reasonable adjustments.

7.0 REASONABLE ADJUSTMENTS

7.1 The University:

- (i) wherever practical, reasonable adjustments or accommodations to the usual Policy or procedure will be made to meet the needs of persons with disabilities. Reasonable adjustments may be made by way of the provision of specialised equipment or services, to the buildings or grounds of the University, or instructional or work arrangements for students or staff;
- (ii) reasonable adjustments that necessitate substantial costs will need to be evaluated against the benefits to be gained, noting that some reasonable adjustments may also be an advantage to people without disabilities;
- (iii) is not legally predisposed to make the reasonable adjustments where it can show that doing so would result in an unjustifiable hardship;
- (iv) will attempt to provide amenities and services in a way that takes into account the individual's needs, considers their right to confidentiality and provides a maximum degree of freedom and independence;
- (v) when considering a candidate with a disability for employment against the selection criteria for the position, selection panels must reflect whether, by applying the principle of reasonable adjustment, the applicant would be able to meet these standards; and
- (vi) shall apply the principle of reasonable adjustment where an employee acquires a disability during the duration of employment.

7.2 Reasonable Adjustments for Students and Staff

7.2.1 Admission, Enrolment and Selection

- (i) applicants with disabilities will be admitted as students or staff to FNU depending on meeting the academic admission necessities or selection criteria which apply to everyone who are enrolling or applying to the same programme or positions taking into account exceptions that have been approved by relevant authorities of the university.
- (ii) FNU offers all students and staff an orientation or induction programme which includes information on offered procedures and policies relating to disability.

7.2.2 Support Services

7.2.3 As part of academic services, FNU offers a range of tailored services and programmes to students with disabilities. These include:

- (i) pre-enrolment guidance and support with enrolment;
- (ii) note taking services;
- (iii) readers;
- (iv) academic practical assistants and sign interpreters;
- (v) moving of lecture and/or tutorial locations when dealing with accessibility issues; and
- (vi) liaising with academic staff in relation to reasonable adjustments.

7.2.4 The Office for Disability Services is the designated office in charge of ensuring that persons with disabilities are provided with appropriate support and services. Students and staff with disabilities are greatly encouraged to get in touch with the Disability Services preceding enrolment or before the beginning of semester or employment. This allows adequate time to ascertain the individual's requirements and for the Disability Office to organise and execute appropriate reasonable adjustments.

7.2.5 It is mandatory, when registering with the Office for Disability Services, for students and staff with disabilities to present suitable documentation of an evaluation from a medical, psychological or other recognised professional specialist. The documentation is to include verification of the disability and recommendations on the type of adjustments required. Recommendations will be considered but may not be implemented as suggested if FNU decides to exercise its right to unjustifiable hardship.

7.2.6 In the event that appropriate documentation is not available at the time of registering, the Office for Disability Services may consent to a temporary medical certificate or educational report. The provisional certificate/report will be for one month, valid from the date of registration.

7.2.7 An individual reasonable adjustment plan (IRAP), will be formulated for each student or staff with a disability or chronic health condition registered with the Office for Disability Services. The IRAP will not disclose the character of the individual's disability or chronic health condition. It will detail, the reasonable adjustments needed by the individual. FNU within a reasonable time frame will put into action the IRAP. It will be reviewed from time to time.

7.2.8 It is compulsory for students and staff to give written consent for their IRAP to be circulated to academic staff and relevant staff for execution.

7.3 Reasonable Adjustments in Teaching and Assessment

7.3.1 FNU will formulate procedures for the reasonable adjustments to be provided in relation to teaching practices and assessment. Examples of appropriate reasonable adjustments include but are not limited to:

- (i) lectures which make use of formats suitable for students with vision or hearing impairments;
- (ii) exam conditions such as transcribers, enlarged print papers or extra time;
- (iii) alternative forms of assessment such as oral exams; and
- (iv) suitable adjustments to field work, laboratory work and practicum according to the type of impairment.

7.3.2 Wherever possible and appropriate, the Office for Disability Services in conjunction with relevant support divisions of the university will provide registered students with course material in an accessible alternative format.

7.3.3 Where suitable, a student with a disability or chronic health condition may be approved to have a Practical Assistant who must follow precise instructions provided by the Office for Disability Services and the student to carry out academic tasks fundamental to the course.

7.3.4 While students are required to meet unit assessment requirements as determined by FNU, allowances will be made for reasonable variations in assessment in order to meet the needs of the student with impairment. All unit outlines in Moodle will have a statement notifying students that: Any student with a disability who may require reasonable adjustments in this unit are requested to pursue guidance and support at the beginning of the session, or soon thereafter, from the Office for Disability Services.

7.3.5 Students will be allowed to utilize aids or assistance suitable to their disability or chronic health condition during examinations. Reasonable adjustments for exams will be specified in the IRAP. Notices of exam adjustments will be made by the Office for Disability Services not less than twenty working days before the commencement of the main exam phase.

7.3.6 Students with a disability or chronic health condition will be allowed to utilize aids suited to their condition during tutorials, lectures, assessments, final examinations and during work placement or educational practicums.

7.4 Reasonable Adjustments for Staff

7.4.1 The supervisor of a staff with disabilities is in charge of negotiating and approving adjustments for that staff, in conference with Human Resources and the Office for Disability Services. Adjustments can be made either to the working arrangements of the position or to the physical work environment to improve the effect of the impairment. Reasonable adjustments may include but are not limited to:

- (i) switching some duties between the person with a disability and other colleagues;

- (ii) adjusting current equipment or obtaining equipment which have been especially designed, for example to compensate for sensory impairments;
- (iii) reordering the physical layout of the workplace, for example to allow for wheelchair access;
- (iv) providing information or training to people without disabilities;
- (v) implementing other ways of completing essential tasks, for example through flexible work practices; and
- (vi) provision of training or other assistance to employees with impairments.

8.0 ACCESSIBILITY WITHIN THE UNIVERSITY

8.1 Principle of Accessibility and Equality

FNU is dedicated to providing access and equity for students and staff with disabilities to enable them to contribute fully and independently, to the greatest degree possible, in the social, academic and cultural life of the University. In particular, the University has the following objectives to:

- (i) ensure that people with disabilities are not discriminated against in admission to or selection of a FNU course or position;
- (ii) provide equipment and support services that prevent, minimise or overcome obstacles to full participation in academic and other activities within FNU;
- (iii) respect the rights of people with disabilities to confidentiality and to ensure the delivery of services to students and staff with disabilities in a way that respects and supports their dignity, rights and opportunities;
- (iv) cultivate and encourage, among staff and students, informed, positive and objective attitudes towards persons with impairments;
- (v) work together with other universities, schools, government, non-government organisations and community organisations to maximise utilization of available resources for students and staff with disabilities; and
- (vi) provide suitable level of resources within available funds in order to reasonably accommodate the needs of students and staff with disabilities.

8.2 Physical Accessibility

FNU is dedicated to guaranteeing that all University buildings and facilities are accessible to students, staff and the community.

FNU will achieve this through an ongoing programme of evaluation and enhancements to the physical access of existing buildings and facilities and guaranteeing that new buildings are accessible and compliant with the most current adaptation of the "Access to Premises Standards".

8.3 Information Services

8.3.1 The University's Libraries and Information and Communications Technology (ICT) will make available resources in accessible formats, services and professional assistance to support the information and research requirements of students and staff. The University's Libraries and ICT will assist students and staff with disabilities to ensure equitable access to information and technology services, including assistive technologies.

8.3.2 FNU will gradually ensure that all new website content comply with W3C Guidelines.

8.3.3 FNU is also dedicated to the provision of access and impartiality for staff with disabilities to enable them to fully and independently contribute as employees of the University in all areas related to employee relations, work and career development.

9.0 POLICY IMPLEMENTATION AND RESPONSIBILITIES

9.1 FNU is dedicated to the equal and effective dissemination and observance of this Policy and is obligated to ensure that it is easily accessible to all relevant stakeholders. The Office for Disability Services in consultation with the Office of the Vice Chancellor has the duty to:

- (i) decide whether a particular adjustment for a student or staff with an impairment is rational;
- (ii) advance the enrolment or employment for a student or staff with a disability if it is decided that reasonable adjustments are feasible; and
- (iii) ensure that persons with disabilities are aware of the University's absolution from any liability in instances of injury where they failed to disclose their disability during the admission, enrollment or selection process.

9.2 The Office for Disability Services has the duty to:

- (i) provide instruction to the University on the adjustments requisite to enroll or employ the individual with an impairment;
- (ii) make certain that up to date, applicable and suitable medical or specialised documentation is provided by the student or staff;
- (iii) attain additional medical or specialised documentation/advice in order to ensure appropriate reasonable adjustments; and
- (iv) provide consultation to students and staff with a disability in order to identify reasonable adjustments suitable to their requirements.

9.3 Colleges in consultation with the Office for Disability Services have a duty to:

Provide teaching and relevant support staff with instruction on:

- (i) how various disabilities affect study;

- (ii) individual student's reasonable adjustments; and
- (iii) inclusive teaching and learning strategies.

9.4 Keep track of the University experience of registered students and staff with disabilities.

9.5 Teaching staff have a duty to ensure that this Policy is applied consistently so that all students are treated justly and fairly as far as possible.

9.6 All persons with disability have a duty to:

- (i) register with the Office for Disability Services in a timely manner;
- (ii) adhere to the adjustments made, based on the counsel of the Office for Disability Services;
- (iii) present up to date, applicable and suitable medical or specialised documentation;
- (iv) advise the Office for Disability Services of their enrolment each semester; if they change their enrolment, take leave of absence, deferment of their courses or discontinue their studies;
- (v) inform the Office for Disability Services when and if their personal circumstances or condition changes especially if it will have an effect on their studies or fulfilling the terms of their employment; and
- (vi) participate in consultations, outreach or awareness initiatives and reviews as and when required by the university or the Office for Disability Services.

10.0 APPEALS, GRIEVANCES AND COMPLAINTS

10.1 Staff and students who are convinced they have been treated unfairly on the grounds of their disability or health conditions are encouraged to use FNU's procedures on appeals, grievances and complaints. FNU is dedicated to accessible, fair and confidential processes for the resolution of complaints based on allegations of discrimination on the grounds of disability.

10.2 Any questions or concerns on matters relating to disability discrimination may be raised with the Office for Disability Services.

11.0 CONTACT

The following person may be contacted in relation to this Policy:

Coordinator Disability
 Office for Disability Services
 Fiji National University
 PO Box 7222, Nasinu, Fiji
 Email: cd@fnu.ac.fj
 Phone: +679 3394000 | Ext: 2030 |
 Fax: +679 3393101
 Office: Nasinu Campus, Kings Road, Nasinu

12.0 REVIEW

This Policy and its application shall be monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. The University reserves the right to amend these policies and/or procedures as it considers appropriate.

Acknowledgements

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