



higher education
& training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

A REPORT ON THE INVESTIGATION OF SERVICES OFFERED TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES IN TECHNICAL AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING COLLEGES

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INTRODUCTION

1. The purpose of the report is to provide feedback and recommendations on the investigation of services offered to students with disabilities (SwDs) in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) colleges.

BACKGROUND

2. The Department of Higher Education and Training (the Department) has the responsibility to ensure that all people inclusive of people with disabilities (PwDs) access and succeed within the Post-School Education and Training System (PSET) system including TVET Colleges. In order to create an enabling environment for PwDs in the fifty (50) TVET Colleges, the Departmental Strategic Plan targets to establish disability support units (DSUs) for Disability Support by end of the 2023/24 financial year end.
3. The 2019/2020 Annual Performance Plan requires the department to produce a report with recommendations on the investigation of services offered to SwDs in TVET colleges. As part of the development of the report a disability audit questionnaire was distributed to fifty (50) TVET Colleges to gather data on the level of support offered to SwDs and thirty-five (35) responses were received. Fifteen (15) colleges did not respond to the questionnaire. Due to the Coronavirus pandemic (Covid 19) colleges were offered multiple extensions to submit their responses through the support of regional offices. The table below indicates the numbers of responses received and not received per region.

Count of TVET Colleges Questionnaire received back			
Regions	Questionnaire response not received	Questionnaire response received	Total number of TVET Colleges
Eastern Cape	5	3	8
Free State/Gauteng	5	7	12
KwaZulu-Natal	1	8	9
Limpopo	0	7	7
Mpumalanga/ North West	4	2	6
Northern Cape/Western Cape	0	8	8
Total	15	35	50

Table 1: Numbers of responses per region

4. The respondents' positions or level of employment/responsibility within the colleges differed as per Figure 1 below. Only three respondents of the thirty-five respondents have a disability.

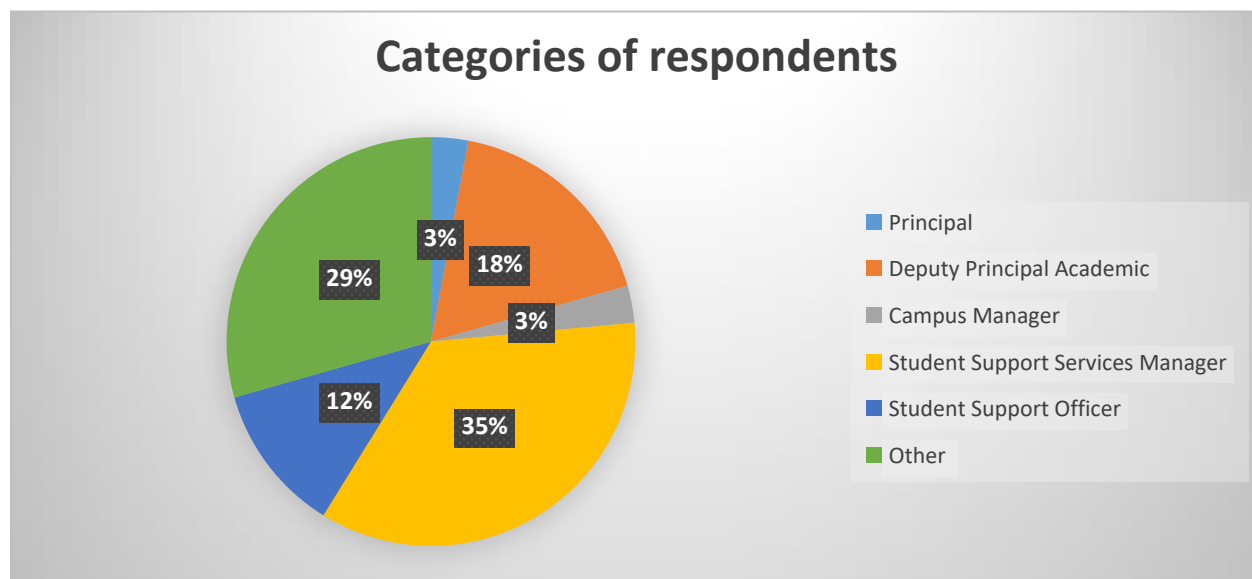


Fig. 1: Categories of respondents

5. Statistics on Post-school Education and Training (PSET) published in 2020 indicates that in 2018 there were 653 177 (378 607; 57.6% females and 278 526; 42,4% males) enrolled students in TVET colleges. 2064 (1221 females and 843 males); 0.32% of the total enrolled students had declared that they had a disability. The numbers seem very low due to various reasons not limited to classification model which was used previously in the PSET sector. A new model of classification of disabilities was approved by the Director-General in 2020 in order to assist the PSET sector in creating an inclusive environment. The previous model had classified disabilities in fewer, big categories which made it difficult to disaggregate information. For example, all sensory disabilities were classified into one code and it was not clear whether the disability in question is blindness or deafness.
6. In addition, some students do not declare their disabilities due to reasons not limited to fear of stigma, lack of understanding/information that declaring will benefit them to access the necessary support to perform and succeed like their peers, lack of visibility of disability support units, lack of understanding that the higher education system operates differently from the basic education system because students are expected to declare their

disabilities to enable the institutions to offer them the necessary support; misunderstanding of their basic human rights, capacity of colleges in mainstreaming disability and supporting SwDs, lack of necessary skills and understanding of lecturers to identify/dealing SwDs, etc

LIMITATIONS OF THE REPORT

7. The questionnaire was distributed to fifty TVET Colleges and 70% of the responses were received. Amongst the 70% of the responses some colleges do not have Disability Support Units (DSUs) and could not respond to the entire questionnaire. Unavailability of DSUs disempower colleges to mainstream disability and support SwDs accordingly hence the inability to complete the questionnaire in its entirety.
8. The interpretation/understanding of the questions varied per college and as such the responses for some of the questions were irrelevant. The interpretation of terminologies surfaced in the responses received. Therefore, some of the responses could not be considered due to their irrelevance.
9. The report is based on self-assessment of colleges in terms of how they are offering support to SwDs. The report is solely dependent on the data received from colleges because there was no verification of the data by the Department. Therefore, the findings of the report must be interpreted and understood within the context outlined above.

FINDINGS

DISABILITY POLICIES

10. It has been discovered that not all colleges have policies in place. 44% of colleges have council approved policies; 10% draft policies; 16% no policies; and 30% unknown as they did not respond to the questionnaire. It was found that colleges with approved policies are those with DSUs or established desks overseeing provision of support to SwDs.
11. There was an indication of how college policies were developed and the involvement of stakeholders such as college staff, SwDs and student leadership in these processes. Colleges which advised of the participation of their various stakeholders in the

development of the policy also indicated that some stakeholders are familiar with the policies whilst others are not. There are colleges which hold workshops, roadshows and share the disability policy during orientation/induction of students.

12. In respect of enforcement of disability policies or strategies, various reasons were given for enforcement or lack thereof. Regarding lack of enforcement of policies, it was revealed that policies were either not in place, not approved, solely used by Student Support Services (SSS) officers or that enforcement of the policy is the sole responsibility of campus managers. College staff are expected to be accountable on issues of disability equity, integration and compliance, however, generally there is lack of compliance in colleges.

FUNDING

13. TVET Colleges with DSUs do not receive earmarked funding from government for their operations. In order to support SwDs TVET Colleges receive funding from the Department based on the numbers of SwDs reported by the college based on the average programme. These funding is earmarked to provide the necessary support to enhance teaching and learning of SwDs for their academic progress such as procurement of assistive devices and human support services.
14. SwDs have an opportunity to access the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) financial support (tuition fees, accommodation allowance, transport allowance and personal care fund) like their peers if they qualify for the support and meet the criteria.

ACCESSIBILITY OF BUILDINGS

15. SwDs are generally experiencing challenges in accessing buildings and other infrastructure due to various reasons not limited to lack of proper infrastructure in line with the universal design principles in order to be user friendly for all. The college infrastructure needs to be accessible in accordance with the universal design principle. The challenges of accessibility varies across colleges. There is a need for the improvement/development

of infrastructure within the sector to improve accessibility. The interpretation of the results are solely based on what the respondents considered as accessible or not¹.

16. The table below indicates if the environment or buildings of colleges are fully accessible rated (1), accessible with improvement required rated (2), and not accessible rated (3).

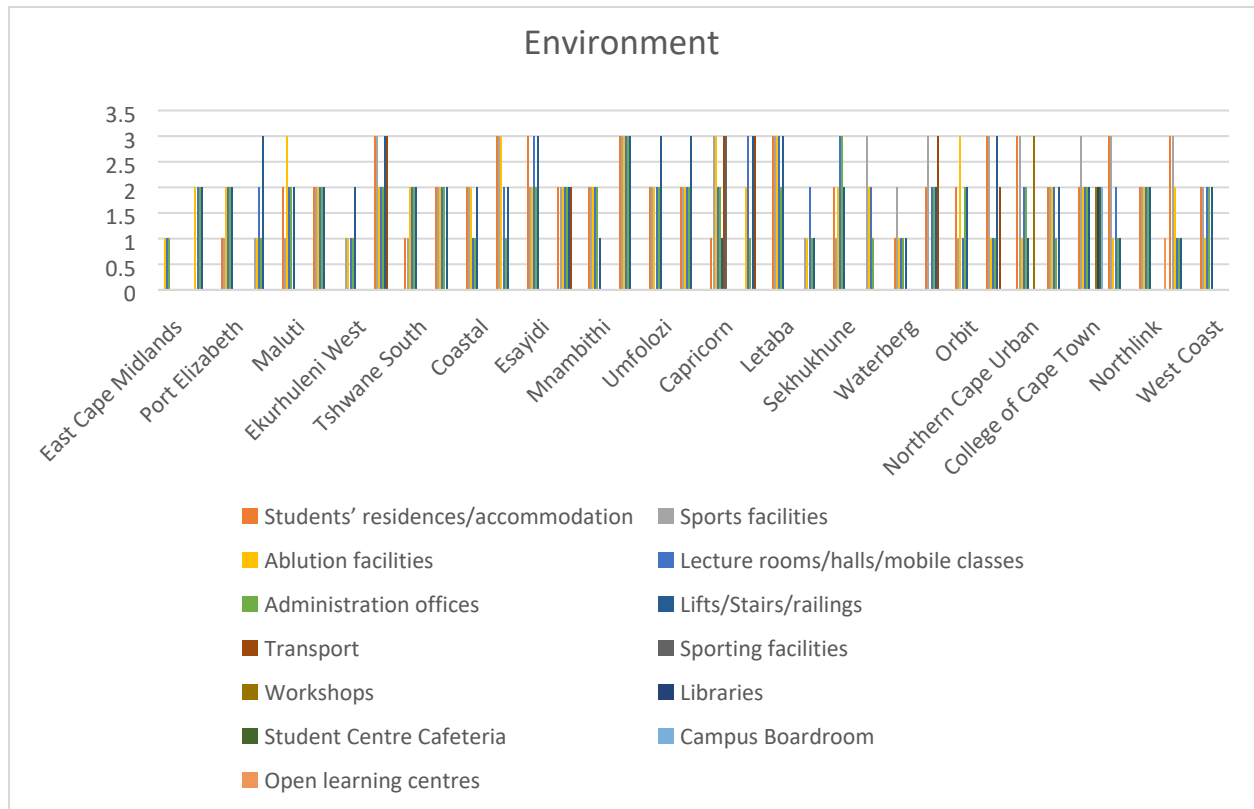


Fig 5: Environment

17. The inaccessibility of the college infrastructure is attributed to the fact that the buildings were developed many years ago when issues of inclusivity were not upheld. New buildings are said to be compliant to universal design and are thus accessible. There are various challenges regarding accessibility across colleges, for example, a library situated on the second floor with no lifts to facilitate access. In this scenario, a wheelchair user will not be able to access the library and her/his basic human right to access information would be denied in the process.

¹ There is a need for building audit of colleges to find out if they meet the universal design standards

REASONABLE ACCOMMODATION

18. Reasonable accommodation for SwDs focuses on issues of technology (assistive devices), attitudinal barriers, and capacitation of staff.
19. Colleges are assisting students with various assistive devices and software required for their gadgets in order to access information and perform their tasks like their peers. The resources are dependent on the types of disabilities that are catered for in a college. Applications for assistive devices are done based on the need. Various gaps were identified in terms of technological resources and support required and this area needs improvement to effectively facilitate teaching and learning.

DISABILITY SUPPORT UNITS/DESKS

20. Disability Support Units (DSUs)/desks are seen as an important part of colleges because they participate in strategic planning in some colleges. The Disability Support unit (DSU) refers to an established structure fully equipped with resources such as financial and human resources to offer support to SwDs whilst a disability desk refers to official/s who offer or are assigned the responsibility to offer support to SwDs in the absence of a DSU within the college. The collaboration between DSUs/desks and other units shows that there is acknowledgement of the role it plays within the college in promoting the inclusion of SwDs in teaching and learning in order to optimise performance of SwDs in their studies.
21. 32% of colleges have disability support units/desks, namely; Ikhala, Port Elizabeth, Maluti, Tshwane North, Majuba, Umfolozi, Capricorn, Sekhukhune, Vhembe, Waterberg, Orbit, Northern Cape Rural, Boland, False Bay, Northlink and West Coast. 34% do not have disability rights units/desks whilst 34% colleges did not respond.
22. The composition of staff within the units or desks varies across colleges in terms of levels of the position/responsibility, qualifications/speciality and salary levels. The titles of those responsible for managing the units also differ across colleges. However, the data indicated that campuses have at least one official responsible for supporting SwDs.

23. In instances where there is no DSUs there is someone designated to work with SwDs and their roles are not limited to offering support for their success, coordinating meetings to gather information about the needs of SwDs, coordination of disability programmes within the college, member of Infrastructure Committee, facilitate partnerships, budgets preparations, procurement of assistive devices, facilitate partnerships, facilitate registration with Higher and Further Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA), policy development, oversee health and wellness of SwDs, ensure that SwDs have equal opportunities as their peers.
24. The knowledge of respondents regarding availability of funding/budgets to support SwDs differ across colleges and the depth of their knowledge often correlates with their level of responsibility. Therefore, this demonstrates the level of transparency or flow of information from the Department to college policy implementers such as disability support officers/staff not in senior management.

OBJECTIVES OF DISABILITY SUPPORT UNITS

25. The objectives of these units include, amongst others, the following:
 - 25.1 Creation of an inclusive educational environment for SwDs through provision of holistic support services during pre-entry and entry, on-course and exit levels ;
 - 25.2 Offer student focussed services such as student orientation, emotional support, group support, financial aid/ NSFAS application support, assistive devices, examinations and test concessions/extensions, exam reader and scribe, dedicated exam venue, calendar of events. In addition, provide Translation Language and Communication (TLC) services, forms of live assistance and intermediaries including guides, amanuensis and professional sign language interpreters, software programmes, etc.; and
 - 25.3 Communicate and liaise with various student bodies towards improving disability mainstreaming within the college's academic and non-academic support for inclusivity.
26. Given their different strengths and weaknesses in respect of resources colleges, the level of achievement of the above objectives is also different across colleges.

ATTITUDES TOWARDS DISABILITY SUPPORT UNITS

27. Attitudes of staff and students are said to have improved towards the DSUs/desks because more referrals are received, students disclose their disabilities because awareness and advocacy programmes are implemented to share information on the importance of disclosing one's disability. Even though there is change, it is an ongoing process which needs to be improved. Students are also encouraged to take responsibility for their academic progress. Peer support and communication shows that the attitudes towards SwDs are changing because students without disabilities are able to assist those with disabilities.

PARTICIPATION IN STUDENT LEADERSHIP AND GOVERNANCE

28. All students within colleges have roles and responsibilities including participation in the student representative council (SRC). Some colleges have SwDs in student leadership portfolios in order to advocate for the rights and interests of SwDs. Some colleges indicated that they host meetings with SwDs in order to understand their needs, whilst others indicated that the student leadership in all campuses have a portfolio overseeing issues of SwDs. Therefore, it is important that all students including SwDs are involved in disability mainstreaming, support and advocacy within colleges.

ADVOCACY

29. The PSET sector is different from basic education, as such SwDs need to be capacitated through awareness raising campaigns and advocacy programmes on how to advocate for their rights and needs during their studies. Students should be the drivers of their success by partnering with support services and lecturers for them to be supported accordingly.

CAPACITY BUILDING

30. Even though there are colleges which capacitate their staff on disability mainstreaming there are those which do not capacitate their staff. The reasons for lack of capacitation may be attributed to training provided to those who deal with SwDs directly, availability of DSUs or health and wellness units and the available budget for capacity building.

ATTITUDINAL BARRIERS

31. Attitudes are perpetuated by lack of knowledge and awareness regarding disability issues. Lecturers react differently in terms of teaching SwDs. This is dependent on various issues not limited to the following:
- Unavailability of disability policy;
 - Timetable developers not being considerate to ensure that classes with students with mobility challenges should always be on the ground floor;
 - Staff members being scared/uncertain on how to support/engage with SwDs;
 - Lack of DSU units with resources (human, financial, technological, etc);
 - Inability to identify and diagnose disabilities appropriately as some of the disabilities are invisible (need for skilled/professional to assist with diagnosis);
 - Lack of disability awareness campaigns;
 - Lack of access to information on the Electronic Information Management System (EMIS) to identify SwDs;
 - Unavailability of specialists in dealing with SwDS;
 - Reluctance of lectures to have inclusive classes by claiming that they are not capacitated to deal with SwDS;
 - Short temper and intolerance of lecturers for SwDs; and
 - Lecturers overwhelmed due to academic requirement requiring them to make extra efforts to support SwDs.
32. Even though there are challenges regarding attitudes, some respondents indicated that SwDs are treated well within the college environment. There is patience in supporting students with disabilities due to capacitation on issues of disability by the college.

SUPPORT AND SERVICES OFFERED TO STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

33. The diversity of disabilities in colleges force them to offer various services to support SwDs. It is found that colleges offer supports to SwDs to access the sector and succeed like their peers and the services offered are not limited to:

33.1 Pre entry and entry support

Colleges enrol students with various disabilities which need to be catered for. In addition, there is a need for professional assessment prior to entry or on entry to

obtain reliable results and advise on the kind of support that is necessary for students' retention and progress.

- Policy development, implementation and reporting;
- Consultation with the former school is necessary for the college to understand the type/s of support that should be offered to a student;
- Pre-registration counselling support;
- Elementary career guidance; and
- Selection and placement.

33.2 On-Course support

- Academic support;
- Advocacy and awareness raising;
- Examination and test support: application and approval of concessions, concession for scribes, computers during assessments, support special assessment venues;
- Health and wellness including assessments by health institutions;
- Treatment support;
- Human support: scribes, peer mentoring; etc;
- Assistive devices: application for assistive devices, tablets, laptops, wheelchairs, hearing devices, etc;
- Facilitate training for the recipients of the assistive devices on how to use them;
- Teaching and learning materials: ebooks; large font document, provision of study material through publishers, lessons interpretation, etc.;
- Financial support: bursary applications;
- Personal support: counselling services, family engagement/support to capacitate them to support SWDs and deal with disabilities;
- Life skills support;
- Campus visitations;
- Referrals to relevant health care facilities with specialists;
- Improvement of infrastructure: ramps, residential facilities;
- Coordinate disability mainstreaming programmes;

- Partnerships with various stakeholders for improved support, referrals and advisory services on various disabilities.

33.3 Exit support

- Preparation for employment, entrepreneurship or transition into higher education institution for those who wish to further their studies;
- Colleges create partnerships with industry/private companies for placement of students; and
- Placement with various institutions for work integrated learning, learnerships and internships. Some colleges have employed graduates with disabilities whilst others offer internships to these students. This demonstrates that colleges promote employment of their own graduates and that encourages/motivates other SwDs to work hard in their studies.

MEASURES TO IMPROVE DISABILITY SUPPORT

34. Since colleges vary and have different strengths and weaknesses in supporting SwDs, the following measures are suggested in order to enhance support to SwDs within colleges:

- Establishment of DSUs infrastructure according to the universal design principles with financial and human resources
- Resource centre where SwDs can access human and technological (assistive devices) support;
- Human resources who are professionals and these include psychometrics, occupational therapists, student support managers and officers, career guidance counsellors, student counsellors, social workers, health and wellness officers, sign language interpreters, student liaison officers, special needs coordinator/disability student development officer, remedial lecturers, liaising officer, bursary officers/clerks, community health care workers, disability coordinators, braille transcript; infrastructure manager; nurse; higher health coordinator;
- Partnerships with organisations advocating for the rights of PwDs to assist with disability mainstreaming and advisory services;
- Networking opportunities with other institutions of higher learning regarding issues of disability support for students;
- Sharing of best practice models to strengthen partnerships;

- Capacitate the college community on issues of disability mainstreaming;
- Develop marketing division on recruiting SwDs; and
- Peer support and integration of SwDs.

CONCLUSION

35. Even though there are challenges, colleges indicated that there are various interventions in place to support SwDs to ensure access to colleges, participation in teaching and learning like their peers and success in their studies.
36. There is a need for standardisation of support for SwDs in the public TVET sector whilst also bearing in mind the strengths and weaknesses of colleges. The development and establishment of DSUs with financial and human resources within colleges will improve the support for SwDs. In addition, campuses need to have disability support officers to assist the college to address issues on the ground and for planning purposes.
50. Once the DSUs are established the appointment of support staff should be standard across the sector to improve support offered to SwDs and for reporting purposes. However, appointments may be differentiated depending on the discretion of colleges and availability of funding to remunerate the support staff.
51. Colleges may also learn from each other in terms of developing and establishing DSUs and the criteria for officials to be appointed to support SwDs.
52. The impact of the DSU in supporting SwDs should be assessed continuously. Access, retention and success of SwDs must also be considered as some of the indicators for establishing whether or not the DSUs are performing well and if there is a need for introducing a particular strategy to improve the college's support to SwDs.
53. Ongoing capacitation of the college community in terms of disability mainstreaming and support should be improved. In addition, the improvement of the infrastructure to meet the universal design principles is necessary including information sharing on issues of universal design.