Introduction

This plan is structured to support achievement of the priorities of the RMIT University Strategic Plan 2011–15, Transforming the Future, and its related plans. Diversity among students and staff is part of building a vibrant global university of technology and design; this is a theme of the strategic plan, and is consistent with the University’s historical commitment to providing access to education.

The revised Disability Action Plan 2013–15 continues the work of the previous Disability Action Plan 2009–15. Those items that have been achieved have been removed. The primary objective of the revised Disability Action Plan is that all people who have a disability, long-term illness and/or mental health condition will be involved in all aspects of the RMIT University community and will be included rather than accommodated. It continues to reflect an inclusive practice philosophy and approach and aligns with the University’s Equity and Social Inclusion Plan 2011–15.

Underpinning this document is the need for the University to ensure that all core activities are designed and developed to incorporate the needs of all students and staff, including those who have a disability, long-term illness and/or mental health condition. The Disability Action Plan 2013–15 embraces a number of major legislative and regulatory developments and reflects the social inclusion policies of the Commonwealth and State Governments. The Plan also recognises the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) which underpins Australian Commonwealth and State Law and to which all jurisdictions in which RMIT operates are signatories.
**Key Internal Drivers that Inform our Disability Inclusion and Access Effort:**

The University’s mission, as set out in the Strategic Plan 2011–15, *Transforming the Future*, is to bring knowledge within reach through education and research to enrich and transform the futures of individuals, cities, industries and nations. This revised Disability Action Plan will continue the work of leveling the playing fields for students and staff with disabilities, long-term illnesses and/or mental health conditions, by supporting them to participate in education and employment on the same basis as others.

This approach is also consistent with the University’s values:

**Creative**
- RMIT creates opportunities for students and staff to explore, test and fulfil their potential.
- Imaginative curriculum and research solutions are sought, applied and rewarded.
- RMIT fosters a creative and inventive culture which values achievement.

**Connected**
- Students’ aspirations, experience and needs are central to evaluating our performance and shaping improvement.
- Industry and community are active partners in our education and research.
- Global networks formed around knowledge, industries and cities underpin our operations.
- Collaboration and teamwork is encouraged and a sense of belonging for students and staff is supported.

**Fair**
- Learning opportunities support a diverse range of students, including those who may be disadvantaged.
- Respect for Indigenous cultures is reflected in our work.
- Intellectual freedom and tolerance are nurtured and debate encouraged.
- A physically, culturally and socially safe work and study environment is provided for all staff and students.
- Ethical, honest and open dealings characterise relationships with students, staff and partners.

**Passionate**
- Building enthusiasm and a sense of achievement in our students and staff is a high priority.
- Excellence in teaching, scholarship, research and service is rewarded and supported.
- Cultural and social diversity is encouraged and celebrated.

**Committed**
- Our graduates are creative, skilled, highly employable and purposeful.
- Knowledge and skills developed in our students and staff serve the needs of and bring benefits to individuals, cities, industries and nations.
- Our staff are constructive and agile in meeting the needs of individuals, cities, industries and nations.

**Key External Drivers that Inform our Disability Inclusion and Access Effort:**

- Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and its associated Disability Education Standards 2005
- Occupational Health and Safety Act (1985)
- Australian Vice-Chancellors’ Committee’s (AVCC) Guidelines Relating to Students with a Disability (2006)
- UNCRPD (refer to appendix).
Goal 1
Global in attitude, action and presence, offering our students a global passport to learning and work

Equity and Social Inclusion Plan 2011–15

Priority 1
Ensure that educational disadvantage is not a barrier to access and opportunity, through systemic approaches to engagement, access, transition and success, that ensure difference and diversity are represented in our global student body.

Priority 2
Ensure RMIT identifies high quality candidates through global searches, ensuring skills can be applied in a global context.

Priority 3
RMIT to utilise the expertise of senior leaders to identify best in field globally.

Priority 4
Enhance industry engagement, collaboration and development through mutually beneficial staff and student exchanges and staff secondments across global campuses.

Priority 5
Encourage a highly adaptive workforce and student experience that enables RMIT’s Global Strategy through improved understanding of diversity and inclusion.

Enablers of Goal 1

1. Improve accessibility of student administrative functions and student services to ensure comparable information and services are available to all students globally:
   Create all University online forms as ‘accessible’ to allow students with print disabilities to complete electronic forms independently. Identify best practice and examples of policy regarding disability within the workplace.
   Ensure delivery of comparable disability access, equity and support to RMIT students globally, consistent with the UNCRPD ratified by all jurisdictions in which RMIT award programs are delivered.

2. Develop appropriate policy and procedure to deliver best-practice guides to employing people with disabilities and reasonable accommodation within the workplace:
   Identify best practice and examples of policy regarding disability within the workplace.
   Research and develop a reasonable accommodation policy and toolkit.
   Undertake an assessment to ensure compliance and consistency between best practice and existing RMIT staff policies in this area.
   Communicate new and updated policies, procedures and guides where appropriate to the broader University staff community.
   Roll out the reasonable accommodation toolkit.
   Train emergency and first aid representatives to identify and assist people with disabilities in emergency situations.
   Review and amend emergency procedures and communication to ensure the safety of staff and students with disabilities.
   Develop staff expertise in the implementation and use of disability equipment and standards.

3. Proactively work to build capability and awareness that supports attraction and recruitment of new staff with disabilities:
   Identify and connect with relevant agencies specialising in the career advocacy and placement of people with disabilities.
   Train our recruitment team to manage and support candidates with disabilities.
   Monitor the progress of people with disabilities at point of application through to progression in employment to identify opportunities to improve our processes and their experience at RMIT.
Goal 2

Urban in orientation and creativity, shaping sustainable cities and drawing inspiration from the challenges and opportunities they provide

Equity and Social Inclusion Plan 2011–15

Priority 1
Refine and consolidate partnership activities and engagements within a distinct social inclusion footprint focussing on the north, west and south east of metropolitan Melbourne and East Gippsland.

Priority 2
Grow the I Belong project as a significant partnership activity, bringing secondary students from disadvantaged schools into the city for distinct applied learning exploration of the city, of industry and the professions aligned with RMIT’s key fields and disciplines. Build interest, connection and aspiration through the opportunities and potential for employment embodied in cities.

Priority 3
Focus scholarship and accommodation growth and support on cohorts for whom access to urban education has additional barriers.

Priority 4
Ensure that opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are prioritised in all outreach and engagement work. Grow access opportunities and student outcomes across RMIT’s disciplines and levels of study for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, implementing RMIT’s Statement on Reconciliation.

Enablers of Goal 2

1. Create opportunities for access to urban mobility in education, and actively enable inclusion, through creating physical and technological environments which adhere to the principles of ‘Universal Design’:
   - Convene the Information Technology Accessibility Working Group (ITAWG) to help ensure the seamless operation and growth of assistive technology in the Managed Operating Environment.
   - Identify key positions with responsibility for assistive technology and include responsibilities in relevant position descriptions and work plans.
   - Establish a baseline for disability-related equipment to be available in each campus library and progressively acquire equipment to meet baseline requirements.

2. Ensure that access and egress to buildings and facilities on all RMIT campuses onshore/offshore is fully accessible to people who have a disability, long-term illness and/or mental health condition:
   - Develop best practice Infrastructure Universal Design Guidelines focusing on the built environment, in particular accessible learning spaces and toilets, and enhance signage and building accessibility information provided via the web. These guidelines could incorporate, for example:
     - physical accessibility features included in the University Infrastructure Plan.
     - RMIT building standards to address access issues over and above AS 1428.2 to ensure buildings are compliant with Disability Discrimination Act (1992) and Disability (Access to Premises - Buildings) Standards 2010.
   - In addition, these guidelines could ensure that:
     - there is at least one accessible toilet with auto-door in each RMIT multistory building that can accommodate people who use large motorised wheelchairs and/or scooters.
     - procedures are developed to prioritise room changes to accommodate students with mobility impairments where classes have been scheduled in inaccessible teaching spaces.
     - Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans are created for students/staff with a disability, long-term illness and/or mental health condition.

3. Develop systems and processes within the University to enhance the successful transition of students with disabilities, long-term illnesses and/or mental health conditions from school to tertiary education and into a professional future:
   - Ensure that University Orientation and Transition recognises students with disabilities, long-term illnesses and/or mental health conditions as a group vulnerable to transition challenges and addresses disability in its work plan.
   - Run transition focus groups with students with disabilities, long-term illnesses and/or mental health conditions registered with the Disability Liaison Unit (DLU) as part of the Students Group series of transition focus groups held each year.
   - Communicate prior to enrolment with those students who have indicated that they have a disability, long-term illness and/or mental health condition on their Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) or Special Entry Access Scheme (SEAS) application to offer early transition support.
Goal 3

Connected through active partnerships with professions, industries and organisations to support the quality, reach and impact of our education and research

Priority 1
Develop our capacity to speak to educational opportunity through the lens of disciplines, professions and industry outcomes, building a story of (and real access to) pathways and outcomes for learners from disadvantaged backgrounds across preparatory, tertiary, postgraduate and research cohorts.

Priority 2
Build stronger links and partnerships with organisations and programs that provide cohort and industry mentoring for disadvantaged learners to maximise opportunities for success.

Priority 3
Develop mechanisms, and use the Program Annual Review (PAR), to understand cohort patterns of access, retention, progression and success, to support learning and teaching, inclusive curriculum, preparation and embedded academic literacies programs. Develop statements of ‘inherent requirements’ informed by discipline and industry requirements to support informed student choice and outcomes.

Priority 4
Develop an understanding of and framework to support and encourage student diversity and the progression of students from disadvantaged backgrounds in research, implementing an embedded approach to application, access and transition for research cohorts.

Priority 5
Ensure the University identifies opportunities to attract and retain talented staff and students from diverse backgrounds, and provides a supportive organisational culture where social inclusion and diversity is valued.

Enablers of Goal 3

1. Enable online information and resources to be accessible and meet required legislative obligations:
   - Ensure online student administration procedures are compliant with web accessibility legislative requirements.

2. Create opportunities for mobility in education by resourcing teaching and general staff to address the needs of students with a disability, long-term illness and/or mental health condition in learning and assessment design:
   - Address inclusive teaching practice in the Professional Development for Tertiary Teaching Practice (PDTTP) program.
   - Include information about inclusion in academic and teacher induction programs.

Address the needs of students with a disability, long-term illness and/or mental health condition in academic policies and procedures. In particular, encourage the provision/active use of:

- updated course guides, including reading materials at least four weeks prior to semester. This will enhance the University’s ability to provide alternatively formatted study materials to students with print disabilities.
- additional exam papers each semester to Exams and Graduations (EAG). This will ensure greater flexibility with the coordination of exam arrangements on behalf of students registered with the University’s DLU
- Lectopia/Echo 360, Blackboard and other learning and teaching technologies that will enhance the academic experience of all students including those with disabilities, long-term illnesses and/or mental health conditions. It is recommended that the use of such technologies by academics/teaching staff be on an ‘opt out’ basis.

Develop an ‘instruction’ on implementing alternate assessment arrangements.

Ensure that inherent requirements are explicit in all academic program/course guides, consistent with priorities 1 and 3 in the Academic Plan. This will lead to students being able to make better informed enrolment decisions, which in turn will lead to increased student success. More students will be studying in programs they feel most suited to and there will be a corresponding decline in the number of students at risk.

Develop University-wide enrolment selection tools linked to inherent requirements for all academic programs.

Identify Work Integrated Learning (WIL)/placement challenges and develop best practice guidelines to support inclusion.
Enablers of Goal 3 - Continued

3. Provide employment, professional development and leadership opportunities to all eligible people including those with disabilities, long-term illnesses and/or mental health conditions:

Develop an Inclusive Employment Strategy in collaboration with the University’s DLU. This strategy could relate to areas such as:

- recruitment and selection. For example, assistance to managers and selection panels with key processes by providing timely advice on the University’s disability legislative obligations (tools and resources could be developed).

- reasonable adjustment arrangements. For example, the provision of relevant information to staff with disabilities, long-term illnesses and/or mental health conditions, on disability access pertaining to how reasonable adjustments can be arranged, if required, as part of the new staff induction.

- access to employment, professional development and leadership opportunities for staff and students with a disability, long-term illness and/or mental health condition.

- disability and mental health awareness. For example, skills training could be provided via developME for managers and staff.

Engage with an external provider with specialist disability expertise to assist in actively encouraging employment applications from appropriately qualified people with a disability, long-term illness and/or mental health condition.

4. Raise awareness within current management and staff community regarding disability, long-term illness and/or mental health within the workplace:

Undertake initiatives and communication to raise general awareness of disability within the workplace with particular focus on frontline staff. This could include, for example, the DLU providing regular disability awareness sessions via developME which could cover:

- disability legislative responsibilities
- role and functions of the DLU
- service delivery case studies and role-plays
- Online Staff Disability Awareness Modules, developed by HR in consultation with DLU.

Explore RMIT’s involvement in International Day of People with Disability.

Investigate ways to encourage and support disclosure to improve data capture regarding staff with disabilities and their needs.

Develop connections with disability organisations to further raise awareness within RMIT and leverage from best practice within industry.

5. Develop closer and more seamless links across the University community to support people with disabilities, long-term illnesses and/or mental health conditions:

Further develop links between those currently involved in providing/promoting disability support within RMIT to enable a seamless approach to supporting people with disabilities across the full RMIT community – staff, students, visitors and industry.

6. Raise awareness and provide support to assist RMIT managers in the handling of staff mental health and long-term illness challenges:

Raise awareness within the RMIT staff and management community regarding mental health issues and mental health first aid.

Develop support guides and early intervention strategies to assist RMIT managers in handling mental health issues and long-term illness within their teams when these arise, including structured return to work programs tailored to mental health disorders.

Provide education for managers and staff.

Support organisational equity through the effective management of staff complaints.

Work with the Employee Assistance Program (EAP) provider in the development of programs to build skills in stress management and resilience.
This appendix provides an overview of the legal requirements for disability inclusion and access in RMIT’s operational jurisdictions throughout the RMIT Group.

The jurisdictions include:
- Australia
- Vietnam
- Europe
- Singapore
- China and Hong Kong
- Sri Lanka
- Indonesia

Summary
In summary, all jurisdictions have legislation relating to the protection and inclusion of persons with disabilities, particularly with regard to education and employment, and all jurisdictions have signed and/or ratified the UNCRPD.

For simplicity and consistency of approach across the RMIT Group, if a disability plan is based upon the UNCRPD, this should cover legal requirements in all jurisdictions.

It is appropriate, therefore, that the disability action plan is relevant in all jurisdictions and is unlikely to create conflict with any local jurisdictional obligation.

Jurisdictional overview
All jurisdictions – UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

Key provisions include:
- Public premises must be easy to get to and able to be used by persons with disabilities.
- Must provide appropriate forms of assistance and support such as easy-to-read signage, Braille and having sign language interpreters in a public place.
- Providing and enabling persons with disabilities to have access to accessibility training, new technology and information.
- All new non-residential buildings must install visual alarms in the form of a strobe or flashing light device at designated locations, to assist with hearing impairments.
- Non-residential buildings must have two designated holding points for the safety of persons with disabilities during emergencies. Distress buttons or voice communication devices should be made available to call for assistance.
- Must ensure that persons with disabilities are not taken advantage of or abused.
- Persons with disabilities must not be denied education because of their disability, and must get the same quality education as everybody else.
- Must make it possible to learn Braille, sign language and other forms of communication (where needed) and have peer support and mentoring.
- Must ensure that teachers are employed and trained with the right skills to support persons with disabilities.
- Must provide opportunities to persons with disabilities to access tertiary education, lifelong learning and vocational training.

Vietnam
In addition to the UNCRPD, Vietnam also has the National Law on Persons with Disabilities. This National Law requires institutions and organisations to care for people with disabilities and protect their legitimate rights and benefits.

Forbidden actions include: vilification; discrimination; abuse or taking advantage of people with disabilities.

With regard to educational approaches, these can be inclusive, integrated or special needs, with a preference for inclusive. Appropriate education tools must be provided and classes using sign language provided for hearing / speaking impairments and Braille for visual impairments.

It must be noted that, in Vietnam culture and legislation, there is a great emphasis on the family to provide aid and active support which may need to be accommodated in a way that may be considered contrary to privacy law in Australia. This will need to be managed accordingly in that jurisdiction.
Jurisdictional Overview

Europe
European law is based upon the UNCRPD.

Singapore
Singapore law is based upon the UNCRPD but also has the Enabling Masterplan 2012–16. The Enabling Masterplan aims to fulfil a vision for an inclusive Singapore where every person with disability can maximise his potential and is embraced as an integral member of society.

Education is identified as a key area across the life of a person with disabilities and emphasis placed upon implementing structured education support for students with special needs (SPED) in all institutes of higher learning. Key requirements for SPED students in higher education include:

- physical integration – co-location on the same physical site as mainstream peers and share the same physical facilities
- social integration – sharing of social and living spaces or engage in non-academic subjects such as music, co-curricular activities together
- academic integration – attendance of academic classes together with mainstream peers and pursuit of the same set of academic goals and activities.

China
In addition to the UNCRPD, China has two key disability laws: Law on the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of People with Disabilities and the Regulations on the Education of Persons with Disabilities.

These prohibit discrimination, denial of enrolment, abuse or vilification on the basis of disability. Standards for construction and teaching aids must be implemented in all Provinces and persons with disability must be able to enjoy equal rights with other citizens. Adoption of special education methods is required according to different types of disabilities and ability of learning.

Hong Kong
In addition to the UNCRPD, Hong Kong has the Disability Discrimination Ordinance which makes it unlawful for discrimination or vilification with regard to disability. Discrimination includes rights of tertiary and vocational education; access to premises; advertising; and also includes prohibitions to vilify or harass any student or staff member on the basis of disability, or to incite others to do so.

Positive discrimination to protect or support a person with a disability is not an offence; and it is not an offence to discriminate if it relates to an infectious disease or is reasonably necessary to protect public health.

Sri Lanka
Sri Lanka signed the UNCRPD in 2007 but as at July 30 2013, this had not yet been ratified by the Government.

Sri Lanka has the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act; Promotion of Accessibility in the Physical Environment; and the Mental Health Act. In particular these Acts provide for the protection of individual rights making particular mention of discrimination in employment and education, and access to public places. The Mental Health Act provides for support in tertiary education and protects the human rights and dignity of those with mental health issues.

Indonesia
Indonesia has recently ratified the UNCRPD and a disability law, based upon this Convention, is being drafted.