

Media Release

Chiefs of Staff, News Directors

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Supporting students living with disability

Students living with disability should be given the opportunity to more accurately disclose the nature of their disability, so they can receive the appropriate support to succeed, the latest report shows.

Led by the University of Tasmania's Professor Sue Kilpatrick, the report was commissioned by the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE) at Curtin University, and its findings have been released by the Centre today.

The research explored data collected by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training, and analysed the success and retention rates of students with different categories of disability.

Researchers also followed up with nine disability support practitioners at nine different universities.

"We know students living with disability have a lower retention and success rate at university than the average student population," Professor Kilpatrick said.

"We also know these students at different universities have different levels of success, and we were interested in finding out more about why, and what is best practice."

Professor Kilpatrick said the study had identified the need for national consistency to categorising students living with disability, and in particular to encourage students with mental health disability to identify in a single category.

"One of our key findings is that universities do not have sufficient information about the composition of their student population to be able to allocate resources to better assist these students," Professor Kilpatrick said.

“There are categories for disclosing disability – various physical disability categories, medical and other, but there’s no particular category for mental health or students with autism.

“We found that the medical and other categories accounted for the largest proportion of these students – but what we don’t know is whether these students have autism or a mental health disability, for example.

“One of our key recommendations is to give students the opportunity to disclose mental health and autism, so we can provide the appropriate services for these cohorts.”

The report has resulted in the development of a set of guiding principles for future discussion and consultation across the disability sector, with a view to supporting a good practice approach in higher education institutions.

NCSEHE Director Professor Sue Trinidad said the findings highlighted the need for continued focus on making universities more inclusive environments.

“Universities are enrolling increasing numbers of students with disability, widening the participation in higher education by this cohort,” Professor Trinidad said.

“While the improvement in enrolments is to be celebrated, more needs to be done to support and retain these students so that they too may benefit from the long-term benefits associated with attaining a university qualification.”

The full report is available online [here](#).

Information released by:

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