

Access and Equity Policy

Purpose and Legislative Background:

The purpose of this policy is to ensure that Yarra College Australia (YCA) provides and maintains a training environment that upholds fair and reasonable opportunity for all learners. Every student must be able to participate in learning, assessment, and related activities in an environment free from discrimination, harassment, bullying, or vilification.

This policy underpins YCA's commitment to providing education and training in accordance with the Standards for RTOs 2025, the Education Services for Overseas Students (ESOS) Act 2000, and the National Code of Practice for Providers of Education and Training to Overseas Students 2018 (National Code 2018). It also ensures compliance with federal and state-based equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation.

All students will be recruited ethically, transparently, and consistently with the requirements of these frameworks. Student selection decisions will comply with equal opportunity legislation and will be based on the applicant's ability to meet the competency standards and outcomes of the course, taking into account prior learning, qualifications, and experience.

YCA's Access and Equity Policy also reflects our responsibility to support diversity in the vocational education and training (VET) sector, including fostering a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, and ensuring students from all cultural and linguistic backgrounds feel supported. This policy is published on the YCA website, provided in the Student Handbook, and available in accessible formats on request to ensure visibility and accessibility for all stakeholders.

Definitions:

Discrimination: Occurs when a person is treated less favourably than others because of circumstances, characteristics, or beliefs.

- **Direct discrimination** involves openly treating a person unfairly based on stereotypes.
- **Indirect discrimination** occurs when rules or policies appear neutral but in practice disadvantage certain groups.

Harassment: Any unwelcome behaviour that humiliates, offends, or intimidates another person. This can be verbal, non-verbal, physical, or sexual in nature, and may occur between staff, contractors, students, or peers.

Sexual Harassment: Includes unwelcome sexual comments, jokes, innuendo, touching, propositions, or displaying offensive material.

Vilification: Behaviour that incites hatred or severe ridicule of a person or group based on attributes such as race, religion, sexuality, or disability.

Victimisation: Any act of reprisal against a person for making or supporting a complaint of harassment or discrimination.

Reasonable Adjustment: Modifications to learning, assessment, or the training environment to enable participation for students with disability, without compromising the integrity of the training outcome.

Policy Principles:

YCA applies the following principles to uphold access and equity:

- All training and assessment policies and procedures incorporate equity and fairness.
- All students, regardless of gender, age, disability, culture, religion, socio-economic background, or sexual identity, have equitable access to courses, facilities, resources, and services.
- Enrolment practices are ethical and non-discriminatory. Selection is based on course entry requirements and the student's capacity to succeed.
- YCA provides reasonable adjustments where necessary to ensure students with disabilities can participate fully in learning and assessment.
- The learning environment will promote dignity, respect, cultural safety, and inclusiveness for all students.
- Harassment, bullying, vilification, or discrimination in any form will not be tolerated.

Special Needs and Reasonable Adjustment:

At enrolment, students are encouraged to disclose any disability, impairment, or condition that may impact their studies. YCA staff will work collaboratively with the student to implement reasonable adjustments, such as additional support services, modified learning resources, or alternative assessment arrangements.

Where the requirements of a training package cannot be adjusted (e.g., core physical or professional standards), YCA will clearly explain these limitations before enrolment and suggest alternative training pathways where appropriate.

Harassment, Bullying, and Vilification:

YCA maintains a **zero-tolerance stance** on harassment, bullying, or vilification. All staff, students, contractors, and visitors are expected to treat one another with dignity and respect.

- **Harassment:** YCA will not tolerate any behaviour that creates an offensive or hostile environment.
- **Bullying and Violence:** Intimidating behaviour, threats, or violence are strictly prohibited.
- **Vilification:** Actions or words that incite hatred or discrimination based on personal attributes are not acceptable.

Complaints of harassment or bullying will be investigated promptly, confidentially, and fairly. Disciplinary action, including termination of enrolment or employment, may be taken where misconduct is proven.

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Complaints and Resolution:

Students and staff are encouraged to resolve issues informally where possible. If informal resolution is not successful, YCA provides access to a structured complaints and appeals process.

All complaints are handled:

- Confidentially, with respect for all parties involved.
- Promptly, with a clear timeframe for resolution.
- Impartially, ensuring procedural fairness and absence of bias.

Complaints of discrimination, harassment, or bullying are taken seriously and documented. Outcomes may include counselling, mediation, disciplinary action, or referral to external bodies.

No complainant will be victimised for raising concerns in good faith. Frivolous or malicious complaints, however, will not be tolerated. This procedure must be read in conjunction with YCA's Complaints and Appeals Policy to ensure consistency in complaint handling.

Responsibilities:

CEO

- Ensures YCA maintains compliance with SRTOs 2025, the ESOS Act, and all anti-discrimination legislation.
- Provides leadership to create an inclusive and culturally safe environment.
- Oversees the handling of complaints and ensures confidentiality.

Training Manager

- Ensures trainers and assessors integrate equity and inclusiveness into course delivery and assessment.
- Provides guidance on reasonable adjustment and student support strategies.

Trainers and Assessors

- Deliver training in a way that respects the diversity of learners.
- Report concerns about student welfare, harassment, or discrimination to the Training Manager or Student Support.
- Implement reasonable adjustments as required.

Student Support Officers

- Provide advice, counselling referrals, and practical assistance to students facing barriers.
- Monitor the effectiveness of adjustments and interventions.
- Record and maintain support documentation.

Students

- Respect the rights of others and contribute to a safe and inclusive learning environment.
- Report inappropriate behaviour to staff.
- Participate in training and assessment responsibly.

Related Legislation:

This policy is informed by:

- Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)
- Disability Standards for Education 2005 (Cth)
- Standards for RTOs 2025
- ESOS Act 2000 and National Code 2018

Records Management:

All records relating to access and equity complaints are retained securely in line with YCA's Records Management Policy. Records include complaints, investigation notes, and outcomes, and are retained for a minimum of five years.

Monitoring and Continuous Improvement:

The CEO and Training Manager will regularly review YCA's access and equity practices to ensure they remain effective and compliant. Feedback from staff, students, and complaints will be analysed to identify areas for improvement. Changes will be documented in the Continuous Improvement Register.

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Approval and Review:

This policy takes effect once approved by the CEO of Yarra College Australia. It will be reviewed every year or earlier if legislative or regulatory changes occur.

Access and Equity Procedure & Process:

Purpose of Procedures:

The purpose of these procedures is to outline how Yarra College Australia (YCA) applies its Access and Equity Policy in practice. The procedures ensure that all students, staff, and stakeholders are treated fairly and equitably, that support is provided for learners with diverse needs, and that any concerns of discrimination, harassment, or disadvantage are addressed promptly and effectively.

Key Principles Guiding Procedures:

- Access and equity principles must be integrated into **all student and staff interactions**.
- Training and assessment must be delivered in a way that supports individual differences while maintaining competency outcomes.
- Harassment, discrimination, bullying, and vilification will not be tolerated in any form.
- All staff have a responsibility to model inclusive behaviour and respond promptly to equity concerns.
- Complaints will be managed confidentially, fairly, and in line with natural justice principles.

Access and Equity Procedure – Step by Step:

A. Student Recruitment and Enrolment

Step 1: Pre-enrolment Information

- All marketing and enrolment material will include statements promoting YCA's commitment to access and equity.
- Prospective students will be provided with information about entry requirements, course demands, support services, and the availability of reasonable adjustments.

Step 2: Enrolment Assessment

- Admissions staff will assess applications fairly, based on prior qualifications, experience, and capacity to meet course requirements.
- At enrolment, students are asked to identify any support needs or circumstances that may require reasonable adjustments.

Step 3: Admission Decision

- Selection decisions are documented and based on transparent, non-discriminatory criteria.
- Students not meeting entry requirements are offered advice on alternative training pathways.

B. Induction and Orientation

- During orientation, students are informed of their rights and responsibilities under the Access and Equity Policy.
- The Student Handbook outlines procedures for reporting discrimination, harassment, or bullying.
- Students are introduced to Student Support Officers and the complaints and appeals processes.

C. Identifying and Supporting Students with Special Needs

Step 1: Disclosure

- Students are encouraged (but not required) to disclose disabilities, impairments, or circumstances impacting learning.

Step 2: Needs Assessment

- Student Support Officers (SSOs) meet with the student to discuss support needs.
- Documentation (e.g., medical certificates, psychologist reports) is requested where necessary.

Step 3: Reasonable Adjustment

- SSOs and Trainers determine adjustments (e.g., extended time for assessments, assistive technology, modified learning resources).
- Adjustments are documented in a Reasonable Adjustment Record, signed by the student and Training Manager.

Step 4: Review

- Adjustments are reviewed each study period to ensure they remain effective.

D. Harassment, Bullying, or Discrimination Concerns

Step 1: Immediate Response

- Any staff or student who experiences or witnesses harassment, bullying, or discrimination must report it to a Trainer, Student Support Officer, or directly to the CEO.

Step 2: Informal Resolution (Optional)

- Where appropriate, SSOs or Trainers may attempt to resolve the matter informally, e.g., by speaking with the parties involved.

Step 3: Formal Complaint

- If informal resolution is not possible, a written complaint is submitted using the Access & Equity Complaint Form.
- Complaints are acknowledged within **5 working days**.

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Step 4: Investigation

- The CEO or delegated Compliance Officer investigates the complaint.
- Both complainant and respondent are given the opportunity to present their case.
- All matters are treated confidentially.

Step 5: Outcome

- A written outcome is provided within **20 working days**.
- Outcomes may include counselling, mediation, warnings, disciplinary action, or termination of enrolment/employment for severe breaches.

Step 6: Appeals

- If the complainant is not satisfied, they may access YCA's Complaints and Appeals Policy.
- External referral (e.g., Overseas Student Ombudsman) is available where internal appeals are exhausted.

E. Staff Responsibilities and Training

- All staff must complete induction on Access and Equity, anti-discrimination, and harassment prevention.
- Staff must demonstrate inclusive teaching practices (e.g., using non-discriminatory language, culturally respectful examples, flexible delivery methods).
- Trainers must report concerns about student welfare or discriminatory behaviour to the Training Manager.

F. Continuous Improvement

- All complaints, incidents, and feedback relating to access and equity are recorded in the Continuous Improvement Register.
- Trends are reviewed quarterly by the CEO and Training Manager.
- Policy and procedures are updated where deficiencies are identified.

Management Action and Responsibilities:

Role	Responsibilities
CEO	Approves the policy and ensures legal and regulatory compliance. Provides final determination on access and equity complaints.
Training Manager	Ensures trainers apply inclusive practices and reasonable adjustments. Oversees student progress and monitors equity issues in learning environments.
Trainers & Assessors	<u>Apply inclusive teaching methods, respect diversity, and promptly report access and equity concerns.</u>
Student Support Officers	Provide counselling referrals, arrange reasonable adjustments, manage complaints intake, and maintain equity records.
Students	Respect the rights of others, report inappropriate behaviour, and participate in an inclusive learning environment.