

LEARNERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS AND REGISTERED DISABILITIES POLICY

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DOCUMENT CONTROL


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1. INTRODUCTION

Optimi College (Pty) Ltd offers a face-to-face and distance learning educational experience. Therefore, students can continue their studies both part-time and full-time. Our goal is to accommodate and encourage lifelong learning in the South African labour force: employed, unemployed and discouraged job seekers.

Optimi College is committed to providing a learning experience that is inclusive and accessible to all students. We offer equal opportunity and participation for students with special needs or disabilities.

The need to identify and support learners with special needs is noted in the following SAQA statement:

“In respect of ensuring a quality experience for all learners, learners’ special needs need to be considered in the design of course and learning support materials, assessment arrangements and communication with teachers, tutors, lecturers, educators or trainers. Learners with special needs also need to be considered in the design of the institution which should be relevant to the form of delivery of learning programmes” (INSETA, 2014).

Furthermore, Chapter 2 of the South African Constitution (1996), the Charter for Human Rights, guarantees the fundamental rights of all South African citizens. In the equity clause, it stipulates the right to freedom from discrimination. The Charter describes some social criteria, one of which is described as discrimination based on disability. Within this context, no individual may neither directly nor indirectly be discriminated against on the grounds of a disability (Stellenbosch University, 2005).

2. PURPOSE

Optimi College recognises the individual needs of students. Student support forms an essential part of student progression toward completing a qualification successfully. Therefore, the rights of students with a disability or special needs must be fully appreciated to ensure that students have the opportunity to participate fully and engage in the learning journey.

Our view of the student journey includes the admission and enrolment process, participation in subjects and courses and use of Optimi College facilities and online services.

Optimi College is committed to considering the circumstances of all students with a disability or special needs towards granting them access to our learning environment in the same way as we offer our learning environment to students without a disability or special needs.

3. SCOPE

The Policy applies to all programmes, students and prospective students with disabilities and is supported by process and procedure aligned to the respective Quality Assurance Councils, Professional bodies and Institutions.

The policy will impact on all student-related policies and procedures.



4. PRINCIPLES

- To promote, protect and ensure the full and equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms by its students with disabilities;
- To provide a learning environment that supports and enhances the College experience for students with a disability or special needs;
- To support and encourage a learning environment free from harassment and discrimination;
- To allow access for students with a disability or special need to appropriate support services;
- To advocate the provision of reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of students with a disability or special need with the respective QA Councils, professional Bodies and Institutions (United Nations, 2008).

5. GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

The resolution process for academic and administrative complaints and grievances is conducted in two phases:

5.1 Disclosure Of Disability / Special Need

During the initial registration process students are invited to self-disclose a disability or special need to the Optimi College Educational Planner (EP). It is the responsibility of the student to register with the Educational Planner.

The disclosure of a disability or special need is not a pre-request during registration but would be an the advantage of the student going forward. A student can never be required or obligated to disclose their disability or special need. If the student chooses to disclose at a later stage during their studies, they can do so at any time by contacting their lecturer or the student support staff with reasonable notice to the College.

Optimi College is a private educational institution and would, therefore, need the appropriate documentation to validate the students' disability or special need(s). Therefore, it would be a prerequisite that written confirmation of the disability or special need is submitted to Optimi College by a specialised medical professional.

The POPI Act guides the collection, processing, and retention or destruction of personal information. Under the POPI Act, Optimi College ensures the protection and confidentiality of all students' private information and disability disclosures through secure procedures. Disclosure will only take place under specified conditions, and with the student's consent or when it relates to the health and safety of the student and others and when reasonable accommodation is requested. Withdrawal of disclosure can be requested at any time, upon the student's disability record and relevant documents will be removed.

All information provided by students regarding the disability or special need will remain confidential and restricted to a need to know basis within all permanent and contracted staff within Optimi College.

The Optimi College is not obligated to provide adjustments for a student who chooses not to disclose a disability or special need.

5.2 Reasonable Adjustment

Each student registered as a disabled or special need learner will be reviewed individually. Optimi College supports each case within its merit and reasonable adjustment.



When modifying learning resources or assessment conditions, Optimi College will focus on increasing the learner participation and experience, without compromising the academic standard or requirements of the qualification.

For this reason, Optimi College will adhere to the detailed policies and procedure stipulated towards satisfying the regulatory requirements of the three sub-frameworks represented by the following Quality Assurance Councils:

- The Quality Council for General and Further Education and Training (Umalusi)
- The Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QTCO) - This would include the Quality Assurance Partners

Practical and reasonable adjustment to a Optimi College procedure will be considered on an individual basis, taking into consideration the student's learning needs, including those of Optimi College, staff, and other students.

5.3 Responsibilities

Optimi College provides a distant learning as well as a face-to-face classroom environment for their students.

Regardless of Optimi College methodology, the importance of providing physical access to buildings and other facilities is regarded as both important for students and employees.

In unforeseen cases where Optimi College cannot meet the need of a student's disability, an alternate arrangement for services will be provided, e.g. when, in future, examinations are conducted on the Optimi College premises.

Optimi College will maintain and improve where possible the level of accessibility to existing buildings.

5.4 Exceptions

Optimi College registration process and procedures (Educational Planners) make provision for students to disclose any disability or special need.

Optimi College is not obligated to make any adjustment or accommodation that may impose an unjustifiable hardship on the College.

Optimi College cannot compromise the academic standards or inherent requirements of a course.

5.5 Roles & Responsibilities

Optimi College maintains its responsibility to:

- Ensure that this policy is made available to all staff, both contracted and permanent.
- All staff receive training regarding the policy and procedures.
- Ensure that this Policy is implemented and applied consistently across the Optimi College learning environment.
- The policies and procedures of Optimi College are aligned to the requirements of Quality Councils, Professional Bodies and Institutions.

5.6 Complaint or Grievance

- Refer to Student Grievance Policy available on the website



6. FUNDING

As indicated in the policy, each student registered as a disabled or special need learner will be reviewed individually. Optimi College supports each case on its own merit and reasonable adjustment.

Therefore, Optimi College recognises that additional cost may occur in addition to the conventional delivery costs. These costs and resource requirements need to be considered on an individual case, within the scope of the Optimi College budget and Terms of Registration.

7. POLICY REVIEW

The Policy on Development and Review of policies provide guidelines for the formulation, development, and review for Optimi College policies and procedures. The review date on the Policy Dashboard will initiate the review process owned and managed by the Review Manager. The Review Manager will delegate the policy and review deadline to the Policy Owner for analysis. The review process is implemented following Stages One to Five of the guidelines. Optimi College policies are reviewed on an annual basis or if changes in legislation or qualifications.

The Review Manager coordinates the new policy development process and the review of policies on an annual basis, in collaboration with the Policy Owner or subject matter expert. The Review Manager ensures that the necessary document management process is maintained in the Policy Master File, both printed (Accreditation and QA Specialist) and online (QMS Final Policies). The Review Manager submits all new and updated policies to the Academic Committee for final approval. The Review Manager is the person who is responsible for maintaining the Policy Management Dashboard (PMD) and reporting on this at Academic Committee Meetings.

