

## MY EXPERIENCES WITH TAFE

I was originally going to begin my Certificate IV in IT full time at the beginning of Semester 1, 2019.

In the October prior to this, I met with the lead IT teacher and a representative of the Disability and Learning Access Unit (DLAU) at the campus which I would be attending along with an Orientation and Mobility Specialist and an Orthoptist from Vision Australia.

During this time, the Orientation and Mobility Specialist and the Orthoptist made assessments of the campus including lighting and accessibility. They then forwarded quite detailed reports, including photographs and suggestions for modifications, to the institution. Unfortunately, these recommendations were not followed up on.

When I met with the lead IT teacher in January 2019 to complete my enrolment, I discovered that none of these recommendations had been implemented. There were still no blackout blinds and the rooms were extremely bright; the lighting was extremely poor, being quite bright in some places and quite dim in others with many shadows being cast; there were very small and difficult to read room markings; and the concrete stairs, which I would need to use to move between the two floors which my classes are held in, were completely unmarked. To me, the stairs looked just like a ramp, which was extremely dangerous.

There is no lift access between the floors which makes it impossible for somebody with a physical mobility issue to attend any IT course involving face-to-face learning at this educational institution.

Upon discussion with the lead IT teacher, they explained that they had made numerous requests to the Facilities team regarding making the suggested modifications and were told that it was too expensive to go ahead with the changes.

Because of the safety issues involved I couldn't begin my studies until the appropriate modifications were made. I had people who advocated quite strongly on my behalf for many months that these modifications needed to be made to enable me to access education in my chosen field of IT. After many meetings with the DLAU and Facilities team members as well as other Uni staff, I was advised that the modifications would be made as soon as possible.

In April of 2019, I met with the representative of the DLAU and the Orientation and Mobility Specialist to inspect the modifications to the relevant areas of the building. The markings on the stairs were now completed which meant that it was now safe for me to begin my Certificate IV in Semester 2. I completed orientation and mobility training regarding safe use of the stairs and was confident in using them.

Unfortunately, the recommended lighting modifications had not been made and there was a question as to whether that would happen. Also, blinds were only installed in the front half of the computer lab with the Uni saying that I would be able to sit in the front of the room. As it turns out, I actually had to sit at the back of the room. Even if I could have sat at the front of the room, as the weather became brighter, the reflected light from the uncovered window area would have impacted me at the front of the room. This also meant that my partners in any group activities would also be required to sit in the front of the room or I wouldn't have been able to participate in the activity.

The room numbers still needed to be made much larger, bolder and higher contrast. As such, I had some difficulty in orientating myself.

As there was no longer a safety issue, I began my Certificate IV in IT Support (as I was unable to enrol in my chosen Certificate IV in IT mid-year). This delay disadvantaged me and delayed my career aspirations. Some of the other changes still hadn't been made at that time and, in fact, were never made.

Once I began my studies, the teaching staff were very supportive and I used the inbuilt magnification and speech functions on the classroom computers. I was also provided with an electronic magnifier with an inbuilt distance camera, which was extremely helpful. Even so, I still got very visually fatigued. Despite being told that due to my low vision and visual fatigue that I would be given a dispensation allowing for extra time to complete my assignments and assessments, this did not happen.

The general campus environment is now safe for me, even if it is challenging to navigate at times. I am happy about the modifications which have been made, although I am very disappointed that it took so much time before this was done (and that some modifications still remain unmade). It is also very disappointing that so much external pressure from my advocates had to be placed onto the Uni prior to them agreeing to implement the recommended modifications which allowed me to study in a safe and equal environment.

I commenced a Certificate IV in Cyber Security at the same institution this year. Due to Covid 19, the entire course so far has been delivered online. It is expected that, as the course continues into 2021, that I will return to onsite learning. I am concerned that I will face the same challenges as I previously did when this occurs. However, a new computer lab has been built and I have been assured that the necessary modifications have been included, although I have not been given an opportunity to tour the lab in question to verify this.

I feel as though I have been discriminated against and that my learning has been negatively impacted. I hope that this enquiry will ensure that no other student with a disability will face the same challenges.