

EASTERN CAPE REGIONAL DISABILITY COLLABORATION



IN ADDRESSING ACCESSIBILITY AND INCLUSION IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Nelson Mandela University hosted the Eastern Cape Regional Disability Collaboration (ECRDC), that recently held a critical meeting to discuss the ongoing challenges and advancements that will ensure accessibility and inclusion for students with disabilities in mainstream education at a higher education level.

The ECRDC As a sub-structure of the Higher and Further Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA), plays a vital role in fostering dialogue and developing strategies to enhance educational experiences for students with disabilities.

The meeting marked another step toward strengthening collaboration among institutions of higher learning in the Eastern Cape.

Established in 2016, the ECRDC serves as a platform for institutions of higher learning to address accessibility and inclusivity concerns

Its' founding principle is to promote dialogue and action toward better support structures for students with disabilities in Higher education.



The collaboration includes the University of Fort Hare, Walter Sisulu University, Nelson Mandela University, Rhodes University, University of South Africa, Lovedale TVET College, Ikhala TVET college, Ingwe TVET College, King Sebata Dalindyebo TVET College, King Hintsa TVET College, Buffalo City TVET, Port Elizabeth TVET and East Cape Midlands TVET College. To ensure shared leadership and diverse representation, the executive team rotates annually, allowing each founding institution an opportunity to guide the collaboration's initiatives.



The meeting focused on assessing progress made in implementing inclusive educational policies, addressing barriers that still exist, and developing new strategies for improving disability support services across member institutions.

Some of the points discussed include the effectiveness of current disability support structures and necessary improvements, enhancing digital accessibility and the role of assistive technologies in education, strengthening collaboration between student support services and academic departments to provide better accommodations for students with disabilities, funding challenges and advocacy strategies for increased financial support for disability services and lastly, the role of institutions in ensuring access for students with disabilities, particularly in TVET Colleges where dedicated disability units are lacking.

The conclusion from the meeting resulted in the following proposed solutions such as Developing a standardized framework for disability support services across all member institutions, to establish training programs for lecturers and administrative staff on inclusive teaching practices, find ways to strengthen partnerships with governmental and non-governmental organizations to enhance resources for students with disabilities, Launch awareness campaigns to promote inclusivity and de-stigmatization of disabilities in higher education spaces, to continue providing support to TVET Colleges by presenting HEDSA's role in advocating for improved access for students with disabilities and, finally enhancing virtual engagement through annual online seminars and workshops focusing on inclusive teaching practices and highlighting student experiences.

The meeting reaffirmed the commitment of ECRDC to improving accessibility, several challenges were identified and these include limited financial resources, inconsistent implementation of disability policies across institutions, and the need for greater awareness among academic staff. The COVID-19 pandemic also highlighted the importance of virtual engagement, leading to the introduction of online conferences, webinars and seminars focusing on inclusive education. However, the collaboration remains determined to address these challenges through continued advocacy and policy refinement.



In conclusion, the recent ECRDC meeting underlined the importance of collective action in promoting inclusive education for students with disabilities in higher education. With a strong commitment from member institutions, the collaboration aims to foster meaningful change that ensures equal opportunities for all students. Moving forward, stakeholders are encouraged to support these efforts by actively participating in discussions, advocating for policy improvements, and championing accessibility in all aspects of education.

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