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1. INTRODUCTION

The Wits Disability Rights Unit (DRU) provides individualised support services to students with disabilities. Disability is one of the marginalised sectors in society. The primary aim and focus of the DRU, is to integrate students with disability, into the academic sector, by way of the support services rendered.

The Unit is uniquely positioned and equipped to overcome accessibility barriers facing students with visual, hearing, physical and learning impairments, as well as chronic and mental illness. The DRU provides support to over a 1000 undergraduate and postgraduate students with disabilities, many of whom come from disadvantaged backgrounds, outside the Gauteng province.

At the beginning of each year, the needs of the new intake of students are assessed. Accommodations provided, are closely tailored to the individual needs of students. The DRU receives operational funding from the University but specialised equipment utilised by students with disabilities is highly expensive, so external funding for this needs to be raised. The climate around the #FeesMustFall campaign, has presented additional challenges, to meet the financial demands needed for updated assistive devices and support for students with disabilities. Staff reach out to potential external donors, to invest in the DRU, to try to meet the shortfall on the comprehensive services required by students over a sustained period of time. The DRU is located in universally designed accessible offices, in the Solomon Mahlangu House building.
2. USERS OF OUR SERVICE, STUDENT NUMBERS AND TRENDS

The Disability Rights Unit’s services are foremost for full-time registered students with disabilities including visual, physical, hearing, learning, psychological, neurodevelopmental, and chronic illnesses. This year, the DRU has moved over to an online registration system which simplifies registration with the unit. The registration numbers for learning and psychological disabilities show a steady increase year on year, as more students recognise and disclose their non-visible disabilities as a factor impeding their learning capabilities. There is also a steady increase in the numbers of students with mental health issues and chronic illnesses. In the Disability in Higher Education Project report (February 2011) the under representation of students with disabilities in Higher Education in South Africa was indicated, with an estimated 1% of the total student population. As of 2015, the Disability Rights Unit also has the responsibility of reviewing applications from staff with disabilities, for reasonable accommodations in the workplace. This involves ongoing engagement with relevant stakeholders, across various sectors of the University, regarding disability accommodations, sensitisation and accessibility related matters.

3. DISABILITY STUDENT STATISTICS

Once again there was a healthy increase in the numbers of disabled students studying at Wits, with 1271 students currently registered in 2017.

3.1 Number of Disabled Students in 2017

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Disability</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronic Illness</td>
<td>383</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hearing / Deaf</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental Health Condition</td>
<td>155</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical / Mobility</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social / Communication</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning</td>
<td>237</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visual / Blind</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temporary</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.2. Number of Disabled Students by Degree Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree Type</th>
<th>No. of Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
<td>869</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Postgraduate</td>
<td>402</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>1271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

![Pie chart showing the distribution of disabilities among disabled students by degree type.]

- Chronic Illness: 30%
- Hearing / Deaf: 6%
- Mental Health Condition: 12%
- Physical / Mobility: 12%
- Social / Communication: 2%
- Learning: 19%
- Multiple: 2%
- Visual / Blind: 16%
- Temporary: 1%
- Visual / Blind: 16%
- Temporary: 1%

Undergrad 68%
Postgrad 32%
2.3 Number of Disabled Students by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>658</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Neutral</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>1271</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.4 Number of Disabled Students by Race

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>714</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coloured</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chinese</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>1271</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Growth of Disabled Students per Faculty (2010-2017)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commerce, Law &amp; Management</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>301</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering and the Built Environment</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>98</td>
<td>174</td>
<td>228</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Sciences</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanities</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>119</td>
<td>121</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>202</td>
<td>332</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>168</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>402</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>468</td>
<td>518</td>
<td>611</td>
<td>995</td>
<td>1271</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. SERVICES PROVIDED BY THE DRU

4.1. Introduction

The DRU supports students who have documented physical, medical, and/or psychological conditions, based on professional reports.

Individualised support services may pertain to:

- Mobility impairments
- Blindness and Visual impairments
- Deafness, Speech and hearing impairments
- Learning disabilities (e.g. dyslexia)
- Psychological disabilities (e.g. bipolar disorder or severe anxiety, depression etc.)
- Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (AD/HD)
- Chronic illnesses (e.g. diabetes, organ disorders)
- Epilepsy
- Chronic painful conditions (e.g. fibromyalgia, scoliosis, back injuries, carpal tunnel syndrome) etc.
- Students with temporary disabilities (for example, injured limbs) may request services for the temporary period needed.

The DRU's services range from, the conversion of study material into accessible formats (e.g. electronic and braille); computer training with assistive technology for various disabilities; a fully accessible test/examination venue for students using assistive technology; South African Sign Language interpreting and real-time captioning services for Deaf students; counselling services and other programmes aimed at students with learning impairments.

The DRU also loans available assistive technology equipment (e.g. motorised wheelchairs, mobile hearing loop systems, digital recorders, e-book readers, tablets) in order to best accommodate students specialised needs, during the academic year. DRU staff also liaise with academics on behalf of students, for varying interventions and accommodations.
DRU Services

- Individual assessment of each student’s needs and requirements.
- Assessment of assistive devices and specialised technology needs.
- Over time the DRU has acquired two specialised computer centres with state-of-the-art equipment. Our computer centres are open to all students with disabilities, who use adaptive devices, such as screen readers/magnifiers, braille displays, voice recognition and other adaptive hardware and software. Students using wheelchairs are also adequately accommodated in the computer centre.
- An IT Adaptive technologist provides IT and support training, to students using adaptive technology.
- A Learning Disabilities Coordinator screens for specific learning difficulties, makes recommendations and refers to relevant professionals, where appropriate.
- Production of individual Learning disability profiles, detailing specific adjustments and support, like study skills programmes are offered to students with learning difficulties.
- The DRU staff liaise regularly with academic and other colleagues on how best to support a student in the classroom and with other accommodations.
- Negotiation of test and exam arrangements.
- Provision of test/examination venue with invigilation services for students who use adaptive devices.
- Wits Orientation Week, includes Orientation talks on DRU services and mobility training for new blind students to spatially orientate themselves to the campus and to their lecture venues.
- Referrals to students applying for funding and support in facilitating contacts for company bursaries and internships for students with disabilities.
- The Academic and Facilities Access coordinator, liaises with the Campus Planning department (CPD) and Property Infrastructure Management Division (PIMD) over building refurbishments and aiming for Universal access design principles new construction of buildings, based on University wide access audits, as undertaken by an architect/universal access consultant, contracted to the Campus Planning department.
4.2. Assistive Technology & IT Support

2017 was an important year from an IT and Assistive Technology perspective. DRU’s computer network was in need of an upgrade to accommodate the increasing number of disabled students utilising our IT services. To ensure future capacity, speed and reliability for DRU users, one of the major projects involved moving to a new primary network server. In addition, the DRU’s satellite office and computer centre at the Education Campus was also renovated in order to provide a more enabling environment for students studying there.

All user queries (staff and students) were addressed in a timeous manner and assessments of new students and staff with disabilities took place throughout the year. IT training to students using assistive technology commenced at the beginning of the year and continued throughout when required. All students who requested training completed the program successfully and were able to access the Wits and DRU’s computer network with the chosen assistive technology efficiently and independently. As one the many services that DRU provides, assistive devices (e.g. screen readers/magnifiers, OCR scanning software, loop systems, digital recorders and motorised wheelchairs) were loaned out to students and staff with disabilities who requested use of these devices. All devices and equipment were supported on a user basis and training was provided when necessary. New assistive technology in the form of Braille notetaking devices (Braille pens), tablet computers, and a motorised wheelchair were also purchased with the help of external funding.

Wits ICT has continued to include assistive technology software for persons with disabilities (NVDA screen reader and Read & Write Gold 10) as part of their default Wits computer image. With these software, all Wits ICT lab computers are accessible to students with visual, learning, and print disabilities, which further assists in broadening access to students with disabilities.
4.3. Accessible Course Material

In 2017, DRU provided accessible course material to blind and dyslexic students studying in various degrees and experiencing challenges with print material. In addition to the course packs, prescribed textbooks and accessible electronic versions were successfully requested from the relevant publishers. Some material was more difficult to make accessible as they contained diagrams, pictures, and other graphical media which needed to be explained in detail in order to make them understandable for students. Music related material (e.g. music notation, etc.) were made accessible using specialised braille equipment.

4.4. Test and Exams

Some students, using assistive devices, write tests and exams at the DRU

- Exams
  - 37 students wrote at DRU
  - 35 Undergrad students
  - 2 Postgrad students
  - 2 students with temporary disabilities

- Class Tests
  - 78 Class tests were written at the DRU during the course of the year.

4.5. DRU Filing

DRU implemented a new online registration process in 2017 which eliminated all paper registrations. All new DRU 2017 registrations were captured and updated on SIMS.

4.6. Study Support

Leading up to the exam period, weekly Thursday lunchtime study support group sessions were offered to students in the DRU boardroom. This group was facilitated by Learning Disabilities Co-ordinator, Duncan Yates. This was an opportunity for students to discuss any issues they had in terms of studies and receive support in a group.
4.7. Real-time Captioning & Sign language Interpreting

The DRU offers a South African sign language interpreter (SASLi) and Real-time captioning support in the classroom, for Deaf students and those with hearing loss. Real-time captioning enables the student to follow on a smart device (tablet or phone), with a mirror image of the notes being captured, so that the student can follow the lecturer in the classroom. The student saves the notes captured, for revision of lecture content. Both services require prior engagement with lecturers, to arrange that classroom presentations are sent to the real-time captioner, ahead of the lesson, so as to facilitate the capture process. There are currently three students with hearing loss, who benefit from this support. Where there is an overlap of classes, an external SASLi needs to be contracted in, at an hourly rate.

4.8. DRU Feedback Report from Students with Disabilities

In 2017 a satisfaction survey was conducted to get feedback and gain further information regarding services that the DRU provides to the students with disabilities. The online survey went out to over 1200 students and positive feedback was received. With student feedback, we gained a better understanding of what areas need improvement and how we can better assist our students. This was both quantitative and qualitative. The feedback was good and indicated that the students are happy with the service we offer. There were suggestions given on where improvements are needed in terms of assistive technology, training and support. There is a plan to carry out this survey on an annual basis to monitor our services.
4.9. Workplace Reasonable Accommodations for Staff with Disabilities

Reasonable accommodation requests, received from staff with disabilities, are reviewed in consultation with the staff member concerned, at the DRU. In most instances, the line manager is subsequently brought into a discussion on workplace accommodations. A reasonable accommodation panel hearing is convened, whenever necessary. Practical reasonable accommodations are implemented by the DRU, like computer and other workplace adaptations, to enable staff members with disabilities, to adequately fulfil their roles and functions. Where job performance is in question, these matters are referred to relevant stakeholders in HR and ER. A meeting was held with DRU staff and HR Managers Forum senior representatives, to discuss the faculty roadshows undertaken in 2016, to enlighten on the policy for staff with disabilities and departmental responsibilities towards funding of accommodations for staff. The policy on the Employment and Advancement of persons with disabilities, is under review.

4.10. Wits Education Campus Satellite Office

The Disability Rights Unit's satellite office offers support to Education and Health Sciences students with disabilities, in a similar way that is offered at the main DRU office in the Wits Braamfontein campus. In 2017 the DRU acquired more office space at WEC, which allowed for a larger DRU computer centre and staff offices. The computer centre also doubles up as a tests and examinations venue, when the need arises.

With students being away on teaching experience, twice in the year, it does present a challenge to have disability awareness campaigns on campus. However awareness raising does take place with the sales of casual day stickers on the Education campus, Medical school, PVT building and Business school campuses in Parktown.
5. DISABILITY AWARENESS

5.1. Disability Awareness Movement (DAM)

2017 has seen a more active participation from the student Disability Awareness movement, which resulted in a 3 day programme, during September Disability Awareness Month. Activities involved hosting a few special schools for children with disabilities and a tour of the campus. A talk on nutrition and disability, evacuation chair training, an evening panel discussion on social integration of persons with disabilities, culminating in Casual day, with sticker sale proceeds going to the Muscular Dystrophy Foundation. A simulated “blind walk” for two senior executive team members, Prof Kupe (VP) and Ms Crosley (Registrar) and other activities on the Piazza, were organised with a purpose to sensitize the University community to the challenges experienced by persons with disability.
5.2. Partnerships with External Stakeholders

There have been partnerships with external stakeholders like DeafSA, the City of Johannesburg and an external events company, to host a Deaf awareness roundtable discussion, leading up to a silent march targeted at the greater Johannesburg community. The aim being, to work towards closing the gap between Deaf and hearing communities, in terms of language barriers and awareness of Deaf culture.

The DRU also partnered with the RedBull sponsored Wings for Life demo run at Wits, as a build up to the national event, where proceeds went towards support for persons living with spinal cord related disabilities.
5.3. Awareness Initiatives with Internal Stakeholders

The DRU gets requests from various departments, including Social Work and Health science students, on an ongoing basis throughout the year, to assist with research projects and to help fulfil part of their practical requirements for their study programmes. This also creates greater awareness of the work done by the DRU, amidst the student body. Students with disabilities, who have shown initiative in their efforts to create awareness on our campuses, are also recognised in a leadership award category, by the Development Leadership Unit (DLU).

During Wits Pride, there was a dialogue about sexual orientation, gender and disability, hosted by DRU. Wits Pride is an initiative in support of LGBTIAQ+ people (those who identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex, asexual, queer and as any other genders or sexual orientations). Information about awareness campaigns, activities and events are posted regularly on the DRU website and through relevant social media platforms.

5.4. Annual Hope School Disability Careers Expo

The sixth annual event was held at Hope School in Westcliff on the 19th and 20th April 2017. As part of the DRU student recruitment and marketing, the DRU send staff members each year, to attend the Careers Expo at Hope School, to recruit learners and advertise our department to students and companies.

Kobela from the DRU, as well as the Student Liaison Office managed a table in the hall for students to receive further information on study options and support offered.
Mr Duncan Yates from Wits DRU, gave joint presentations with UP and UJ to the learners about the options open to them after finishing school, as well as on how to seek employment or apply to tertiary education. He provided good advice on applying for spaces at University and study bursaries. They also discussed some of the main implications of having a job and studying for a degree.

6. DRU STUDENT SUCCESSES

At the Development and Leadership Unit’s (DLU) awards, students with disability were nominated in the category of “Most Outstanding Leader promoting the interests of disabled students on Campus”. This category recognises contributions of disabled students on campus, who have selflessly lead and driven disability awareness campaigns for the rights of students with disability at Wits. They have shown potential as students and future leaders. In 2017, the award was shared by two students who were the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson of the Disability Awareness Movement (DAM), Mr Lehlogonolo Senong and Ms Anna Chrysostomou.

Maria Combrink, a postgraduate student, won the Wits Sport Disability Sportsperson of the Year award. In the same week, she won the Gauteng Sportswoman of the Year with a Disability accolade. Maria was part of the South African team, who competed at the 2017 World Para-Athletics Championships in London, where she earned placings in the shotput and discus events.
7. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS & LIAISON

7.1. Wits Universal Access & Disability

Arising out of ongoing efforts by the DRU to sensitize different departments at Wits, and the assistance of Campus Planning and Development and Property and Infrastructure management departments, the DRU has seen positive results towards improving physical accessibility of our campuses, updates to signage and positive plans and budgeting for future upgrading projects.

7.2. Disability Interest Group

The Disability Interest Group held 3 meetings during the course of 2017. Many disability related issues discussed at these meetings, have translated into positive action and heightened awareness of disability on our campuses.

The objectives of the Disability Interest group are:

- to share and build knowledge on university accessibility, for both students and staff with disabilities
- to provide strategic input on disability policy
- to promote disability awareness through informative presentations, working towards attitudinal shifts in thinking about disability

7.3. Disability on the agenda of the University transformation strategy

The DRU have given input to several transformation documents, to highlight disability as part of the University transformation agenda. The Transformation and Employment Equity office (TEEO), conducted the first Institutional culture survey with a focus group of students with disabilities. Some DRU staff were also involved in a Sexuality & Disability research project with Ford Foundation funding for Diversity Studies.
7.4. Jobs portal – Alumni relations

DRU staff have had many telephonic and face-to-face engagements with companies seeking to offer bursaries, learnerships, internships and job opportunities for students with disabilities, who have qualified. However, company specific criteria can sometimes be limiting.

The “Jobs for persons with disabilities” website link on the Wits Alumni Relations Careers portal, allows for companies to upload their job and internship advertisements, at no cost. This was a DRU initiative in collaboration with the Alumni Relations department. http://wits.alumnicareers.co.za.

7.5. Teaching and Learning, Networking Presentations & Training:

1. Fourth year lectures on disability, given to OT and Social Work Masters students, by Anlia. Alan also gave two lectures to the third and fourth year Speech and Hearing classes. He did some activities to simulate writing difficulties and speech impediments. Duncan presented to Occupational Therapy students regarding disability studies.
2. The DRU offered training to the Central Jhb TVET College as a capacity building and best practice sharing workshop, hosted at Wits.
3. DRU staff attended a 2 day training workshop at UNISA and Anlia attended a Disability and Transition Colloquium at UJ.
4. DRU staff members assisted the Department of Social Development (DSD) with training for an SA representative accompanying the SA delegation to the 10th Session of the Conference of States Parties.
6. Dr Anlia Pretorius as Head of the DRU is also the HEDSA (Higher and Further Education Disability Services Association) Chairperson and sits on the board of the Association for the Physically Disabled (APD).
7. Meetings were held with private companies to establish potential partnerships with the DRU, for sponsorship of specialised equipment etc.
9. Anlia was an external examiner for PhD & Masters research submissions and offered research assistance for Masters and PhD projects.
10. Other research initiatives involved the DRU partnering with Curtin University’s (Australia) Critical Disability Studies Global Research on e-Learning
11. The DRU hosted the Universities of Fort Hare, Venda, Zululand and UJ, to benchmark against Wits DRU facilities and processes.
12. Anlia was asked to do a presentation on disability services at the University of Zululand.
13. Many interviews were conducted on Wits disability services, for Vuvuzela newspaper, True FM & VoW radio stations and Curiosity newsletter.
14. Anlia attended the Cliff Decker Art exhibition on psycho-social disabilities, with guest speaker, Justice Zac Yacoob.
15. The DRU has given input to the My SOS team, who are developing the safety emergency cellphone app for students and staff at Wits, to incorporate an accessible tab for persons with disability, linking up to relevant emergency response resources.
16. Duncan, Anlia, Subhashini and a few DRU registered students attend the WiCDS monthly reading group sessions, focussed on disability research
17. Duncan and Kobela presented at the Mentoring Colloquium 29 March with regards to mentoring of students with disabilities
18. Transformation Committee Meeting for Registrar Division attended by Duncan as DRU representative
19. Duncan participated in a workshop to explore the issue of student participation in their teaching and learning at UNISA on 30 March 2017
20. Tshimologong Wits Navigator Challenge 2017 – Andrew and Anlia collaborated with staff and teams from Tshimologong on developing a navigation system for blind people and wheelchair users at Wits, with the aim to allow students using these systems to safely navigate their way around campus
8. STAFFING

The DRU has **two offices**:

- Main Campus – Braamfontein - Solomon Mahlangu House, First Floor, East Wing
- DRU satellite office - Wits Education Campus - Parktown, Administration Block, First Floor

8.1. Staff of the Disability Rights Unit

- Dr Anlia Pretorius (Head)
- Mr Andrew Sam (IT Specialist)
- Mr Alfred Tlou (Secretary/Test & Exams Officer)
- Mr Duncan Yates (Learning Disabilities Coordinator)
- Ms Pearl Mbolekwa (South African Sign Language Interpreter)
- Ms Kobela Petja (WSoE Administrator)
- Mr Alan McLachlan (Editor)
- Mrs Subhashini Ellan (Academic and Facilities Access coordinator)
- Mx Tish Lumos (Senior Administrative Assistant)
8.2. Staff Upskilling, Workshops & Seminars

With Institutional budgetary cut backs, arising from the #Fees must Fall campaigns, the DRU has had limited training and development of staff. However, staff have tried to attend training and development and workshop opportunities, where no or very limited costs are involved. Ms Pearl Mbolekwa continued with her MA in Sign Language and Kobela Petja, continued with her honours in Psychology studies in 2017. Subhashini attended a few of the SAE4D (South African Employers for Disability), morning workshops, hosted by member companies. These workshops are hosted by external companies with a vested interest in supporting and empowering employees with disabilities. Duncan attended an Integrative Psychotherapy 2 day CPD workshop ‘Tuning’ the self of the therapist.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS AND THANKS

The Disability Rights Unit acknowledges the following people, companies and departments:

External:
The DRU manager and staff explore external funding opportunities for the DRU and study bursaries for students, on an ongoing basis. In 2017 funding was received from the Fuchs Foundation and BPSA Foundation. Bursaries for students were received from King Pie, Dust a Side, TISO Foundation; Sandown Motor holdings and the IDC.

Internal:
The Registrar’s office and all other departments, who the DRU constantly network with and have champions for disability, lending good support (PIMD, Campus Planning department, EGO, Residence Life, Campus Health & Wellness; FASO, SEnC, Faculties and Schools, HR, ER, TEEO, WCCO, etc.). Without the assistance of various internal departments and external stakeholders, the Disability Rights Unit would not be able to offer the holistic support service to our students with disabilities and give them the best possible opportunity to pursue their academic goals.

For more information about the Wits Disability Rights Unit, please visit our website:- http://www.wits.ac.za/disability-rights-unit/