Access & Equity Policy

1. Purpose
This policy ensures that all PICAC learners, staff, and contractors are treated fairly and equitably, with equal access to opportunities and support in a safe, respectful, and inclusive environment. PICAC is committed to delivering education and training free from discrimination, harassment, bullying, and abuse, while fostering diversity and upholding dignity for all.

2. Scope
This policy applies to all PICAC activities including recruitment, enrolment, training delivery, assessment, and workplace conduct. It governs how PICAC:
- Creates and enforces policies and codes of conduct promoting respect, dignity, and fairness.
- Provides equal access to training and support, regardless of personal characteristics or background.
- Comply with all relevant Commonwealth and Victorian legislation regarding access and equity.

3. Standards Referenced

Standards for RTOs 2025:
Outcome Standards 2025
- Standard 2.5 – The learning environment promotes and supports the diversity of VET students.
- Standard 2.6 - The wellbeing needs of the VET student cohort are identified, and strategies are put in place to support these needs.
- Standard 4.3 - Any risks to VET students, staff and the organization itself are identified and managed.

Compliance Standards 2025 – NA

4. Policy Statement
PICAC is committed to fostering an environment where everyone, learners, staff, and contractors are treated fairly, equitably, and with respect. We actively promote inclusion, diversity, and equal opportunity by:
- Ensuring recruitment, enrolment, training, and workplace practices are free from bias or unlawful discrimination.
- Providing equitable access to education, resources, support services, and facilities for all learners, including those with disabilities or additional needs.
- Applying reasonable adjustments where necessary to remove barriers without compromising competency standards.
- Maintaining zero tolerance for discrimination, harassment, bullying, victimization, and vilification in any form.
- Encouraging reporting of concerns and ensuring complaints are handled promptly, confidentially, and fairly.
- Protecting complainants from retaliation or victimization.
- Regularly reviewing policies and practices to identify and address any gaps or barriers.
- Promoting awareness and training for staff and contractors to uphold access and equity values.
- Respecting individual privacy and responding sensitively to diverse needs and backgrounds.
- Striving to create a respectful, safe, and supportive learning and working environment where everyone can reach their potential.

The CEO has ultimate responsibility for overseeing access and equity, including student selection fairness, support services, complaint management, and ensuring ongoing compliance with legal and funding requirements.

5. Definitions

- **Access and Equity**
  Ensuring training is fair and accessible to everyone, regardless of factors like age, gender, culture, disability, language skills, or location that might limit participation.
- **Discrimination**
  Treating someone unfairly because of personal traits or beliefs.
    - Direct discrimination means clear unfair treatment based on stereotypes.
    - Indirect discrimination happens when seemingly fair rules exclude some groups unintentionally.
- **Workplace Harassment**
  Any unwelcome behavior that offends or intimidates, creating a hostile or unpleasant work environment and affecting wellbeing and performance.
- **Sexual Harassment**
  Unwanted sexual behavior that a reasonable person would find offensive or intimidating. Examples include unwanted touching, sexual jokes, or obscene comments.
- **Harassment Types**
    - Verbal: offensive comments, insults, jokes, rumors, or threats.
    - Non-verbal: staring, offensive images, inappropriate gestures, or ignoring someone.
    - Physical: unwelcome touching, assault, hitting, or inappropriate contact.
- **Workplace Bullying**
  Harmful behavior such as verbal abuse, exclusion, or unreasonable work demands that threaten health and safety.
- **Equal Opportunity**
  PICAC provides fair employment and training opportunities without discrimination based on personal characteristics protected by law.
- **Reporting and Protection**
  Employees must report harassment, discrimination, or bullying. Complaints are handled confidentially, and complainants are protected from retaliation.

6. Equal Opportunity

- PICAC is an equal opportunity organization that does not discriminate unless required by funding contracts.
- We support specific target groups including:
    1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
    2. People with disabilities
    3. Non-English speakers
    4. People re-entering the workforce or with other special needs
    5. Women
    6. People from isolated communities

7. Special Needs / Considerations

- Prospective students are encouraged to disclose disabilities or impairments before enrolment.
- Students should discuss any special needs or reasonable adjustments that would help their learning.
- PICAC works with students to offer flexible learning options without lowering competency standards.
- Students with disabilities must meet core unit requirements, though flexible arrangements may be made.

8. Reasonable Adjustments

- Reasonable adjustments help people with disabilities participate safely and productively.
- Examples include flexible hours, assistive technology, or modified tasks.
- Adjustments will be balanced against cost and workplace disruption; extreme costs or disruptions may not be reasonable.
- Discrimination may be allowed if adjustments aren't reasonable or the person can't meet job requirements even with adjustments.

9. Language, Literacy & Numeracy (LLN)

- Training Packages set the minimum LLN requirements which PICAC must follow.
- PICAC supports learners with LLN challenges as long as it doesn't compromise assessment fairness.
- Students below the minimum LLN level will be advised on further learning or support before continuing their course.

10. Harassment, Violence & Vilification

- PICAC maintains a strict zero-tolerance stance towards any behavior that undermines the safety, dignity, or wellbeing of individuals in the workplace or learning environment. This includes:
- Harassment: Any unwelcome conduct verbal, non-verbal, or physical that offends, intimidates, or creates a hostile environment. This includes sexual harassment such as inappropriate touching, jokes, or comments.
- Violence: Any act or threat of physical aggression or harm. All individuals must treat each other with respect and refrain from violence.
- Vilification: Public acts that incite hatred, contempt, or ridicule based on personal characteristics such as race, religion, or gender.
- All incidents are treated seriously. Those found responsible for harassment, violence, or vilification may face disciplinary action, including termination of employment or removal from courses. Serious offences may also have legal consequences.
- Everyone at PICAC is expected to uphold these standards, contribute to a respectful environment, and report any concerns promptly.

11. Complaints Handling

11.1 Purpose

To provide a fair, timely, and confidential process for managing complaints related to discrimination, harassment, bullying, victimization, or vilification.

11.2 Making a Complaint

- Individuals are encouraged to address unwelcome behavior directly if safe.
- Keep records of incidents.
- Formal complaints can be submitted via the HR complaint form.
- If unresolved or uncomfortable, escalate to the Admin or Operations Manager or contact external bodies such as Equal Opportunity Commissions.
- Complaints are treated confidentially, with protection against retaliation.

11.3 Receiving a Complaint

- Managers must listen carefully and maintain confidentiality.
- Supporters may accompany complainants.
- Complaints should be recorded accurately in the complainant's own words.
- Agree on the next steps with the complainant.
- If no investigation is needed or the complaint is unfounded, act promptly and confidentially.
- If an investigation is requested or required, proceed accordingly.

11.4 Investigating a Complaint
- Investigations are impartial; do not assume guilt.
- Interview all parties and witnesses separately, keeping detailed records.
- Maintain confidentiality and minimize disclosure.
- Decide outcomes based on evidence.
- Support complainants throughout the process.
- Refer unresolved issues to senior management.

11.5 Possible Outcomes
- Disciplinary actions (counselling, warnings, dismissal).
- Staff training or awareness programs.
- Counselling or apology for complainants.

12. Victimization
- Complainants should feel safe reporting issues without fear of reprisal.
- PICAC prohibits victimization of anyone raising a complaint.
- Victimization complaints are treated as seriously as harassment or discrimination complaints.

13. Responsibilities
13.1 Organizational Responsibilities
- Maintain and communicate policies promoting equal opportunity and discrimination-free environments.
- Regularly review policies to eliminate discriminatory practices.
- Educate staff and contractors on access and equity principles and complaint procedures.
- Remove discriminatory language or practices in all communications and materials.
- Provide accessible and effective complaint mechanisms.

13.2 Leadership Responsibilities
- Directors, CEO, and managers lead by example, demonstrating zero tolerance for discrimination and harassment.
- The CEO ensures staff awareness of policies, complaint processes, and equitable practices.
- Managers enforce policies, protect confidentiality, and handle complaints promptly.
- The CEO may delegate complaint handling to appropriate personnel or external parties when necessary.

13.3 Individual Responsibilities (Staff, Contractors & Students)
- Prevent and not tolerate harassment, discrimination, victimization, or bullying.
- Treat all individuals fairly and with respect for diversity.
- Maintain confidentiality regarding sensitive issues.
- Refuse to participate in unacceptable behavior and support those affected.
- Follow all site rules and behave professionally during training and work.
- Speak up if subjected to or witnessing harassment or bullying, if uncomfortable confronting the offender, report to the CEO or appropriate manager.

14. Legislation
This policy aligns with relevant Commonwealth and State laws including:
- National Vocational Education and Training Regulator Act 2011
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992
- Racial Discrimination Act 1975
- Sex Discrimination Act 1984
- Various State Anti-Discrimination Acts
- National Code 2007, and others.

15. Monitoring, Improvement & Records Management

- The CEO regularly monitors access and equity practices to ensure compliance and effectiveness, using findings to drive continuous improvement in line with PICAC's Continuous Improvement Policy.
- All complaints, investigations, and related documentation are managed confidentially, securely stored, and retained according to PICAC's Records Management Policy.

16. Supporting Processes

Process Name	Purpose
Complaints Management	Manage grievances effectively
Reasonable Adjustment Request	Support learners and staff appropriately
Support Plan (LLN)	Provide appropriate learner support
Special Needs Assessment	Assess additional support requirements

17. Supporting Documents

Document ID	Name
Support and Progression Processes	Support Processes and Flowcharts
Support and Monitor Plan	Student Support Plan and Monitoring
CI Register	Continuous Improvement Register
Complaints & Appeals Policy	Complaints & Appeals Policy
Learner File	Records of adjustments, complaints, support (Kept in Vettrak and On Learner File)

18. Version Control

Version	Date	Changes
V1	9/7/2025	First Release
V2	1/09/2025	Updated all RTO logos (FiT, PICAC, CEPUTEC, STC) on policies to reflect the merger into a single PICAC policy framework.