

Guide for Selecting a Special/Inclusive Education Post-Graduate Course in Australia

If you are considering completing a special education/inclusion degree to give the skills to assess, program for, instruct and monitor learning progress for students with disability there are features of a course you should consider.

InSpEd has endorsed several courses, see below, and these will provide appropriate preparation. InSpEd relied on publicly available information and courses that we have not endorsed may contain relevant content. The points below will allow you to ask universities about whether particular content is included in their course.

The best coverage is likely to be provided by a specialist degree, rather than a specialisation within a generic Master of Education. You should look for a degree that has at least six units directly relevant to the education of students with disability.

You should check that courses or units that have content on inclusion are specifically addressing the education of students with disability and not students learning English as an additional language, students of varying sexual orientation, students from different cultures, or other groups.

If shared units are confined to units on research methods and a project unit, a generic degree with six specialist units may be satisfactory.

Look for a degree that includes a placement of at least 15 days for practical experience. This will enable you to practise some of the skills taught in theoretical units in a real school setting and receive feedback. In addition to this, consider if there are other assessment tasks across the course that allow you to practise practical skills. These could include, for example, detailed assessment of the performance of an individual student with disability in a curriculum area and/or planning an instructional program or adjustments based on that assessment. Case studies, critique of videos of teaching, role plays with peers and other activities may also be useful activities.

Look for coverage of key areas. These are outlined in the InSpEd standards, and you should look for units including content on:

- developing individualised programs and adjustments
- evidence-based explicit instruction, particularly in literacy and numeracy
- the principles of applied behaviour analysis and their application in teaching and developing support plans
- programming and instruction for students with high or complex support needs, particularly in the areas of communication, social skills and functional skills
- collaborative teamwork with students, families, other teachers and other professionals
- relevant policies and legislation relating to people with disability
- research methods and evaluation of research

Consider who will be teaching the units in the course. Ideally academics should hold a special education qualification themselves, have experience working with people with disability and be actively researching and publishing in areas relevant to the education of students with disabilities.

If detailed unit guides or information about academic staff are not available on the website of the university you are considering, contact the university with specific questions.

It may be helpful to complete the checklist below for each course you are considering.

The degree:

- has at least six units directly relevant to educating students with disability Y/N
- has content on inclusion that relates to students with disability, not other groups Y/N
- includes a minimum of 15 days practical placement Y/N
- includes activities or assessment tasks that involve working with students with disability Y/N

The content in the degree covers:

- developing individualised programs and adjustments Y/N
- evidence-based explicit instruction, particularly in literacy and numeracy Y/N
- the principles of applied behaviour analysis and their application in teaching and developing support plans Y/N
- programming and instruction for students with high or complex support needs, particularly in the areas of communication, social skills and functional skills Y/N
- collaborative teamwork with students, families, other teachers and other professionals Y/N
- relevant policies and legislation relating to people with disability Y/N
- research methods and evaluation of research Y/N

At least some of the academics teaching in the degree:

- have a special education qualification Y/N
- have experience working with people with disability Y/N
- are actively researching and publishing in areas relevant to the education of students with disability Y/N