



ATEND

Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability

Media Release: Disability Peak Bodies Condemn Ableism in Australian Universities Accord

Disability peak bodies, including All Means All, Australian Coalition for Inclusive Education (ACIE), Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET), Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability (ATEND), Blind Citizens Australia (BCA), Children and Young People with Disability Australia (CYDA), Equity Practitioners in Higher Education (EPHEA), National Union of Students (NUS), Physical Disabilities Australia (PDA) and Universities Enable (UE) are devastated by the use of ableist language and the deliberate exclusion of people with profound disabilities in the Australian University Accord 2024.

The Accord has perpetuated low expectations around students with disability by excluding people with 'profound disability' from the data set used to calculate the expected participation rate of people with disability in university education.

This omission:

- is contrary to the objectives of the Disability Discrimination Act 1992, the Disability Standards for Education 2005, and Article 24 of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD); and
- diminishes the achievements of high-profile Australians with profound disability who have succeeded in higher education, such as Graeme Innes AM and Dr. Dinesh Palipana.

The Accord has also set participation targets that only aim to maintain, rather than increase, the participation rate for students with disability. This demonstrates low expectations and a failure to consider the continued discrimination and adverse outcomes experienced by students with disability.

The peak bodies call for:

1. An immediate retraction of the ableist language used in the Accord and a recalculation of the target participation rate for students with disability to be inclusive of all people.
2. The inclusion of people with disability and people with expertise in working with students with disability in higher education in the implementation of the recommendations of the Accord.
3. Addition of specific provisions to the national student charter and the National Student Ombudsman that address the specific needs of students with a disability as identified in the Royal Commission and enshrined in the DDA and the CRPD.
4. The implementation of actions that enable students with disability to participate and succeed in higher education, including the application of Universal Design for Learning principles.

The peak bodies warn that if the Accord's current position is adopted as Government policy, it will send disability inclusion efforts backwards, as well as normalising low expectations, and potentially give universities license to avoid making their programs accessible to students with significant support needs, which is illegal under existing laws and policies.

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Endorsed by:

All Means All

Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training (ADCET)

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