

Our commitment to contributing to a society inclusive of people with disability

The Australian Council of Learned Academies (ACOLA) is the convening body of Australia’s Learned Academies¹, and provides expert interdisciplinary advice to inform policy and develop innovative solutions to complex national and global problems. We have been pleased to work with the Australian Government to explore how to improve the disability responsiveness of various occupations through education and training. With the project complete, the hard work starts. We acknowledge that we too have a role in translating these words into action.

We all have the right to a fair, accessible, and inclusive society, but, unfortunately, this is often not everyone’s experience. People with disability face many barriers, including access to services and businesses. While discrimination may not be overt or intentional, inadequate knowledge and training about disability can mean staff and employers lack the skills to respond to people with disability.

Through this project, we identified what is needed through training and professional development to help specific sectors and occupations realise a responsive approach toward the rights of people with disability. The project developed a Good Practice Guide and Action Plan that identified areas for action by all stakeholders, including all levels of government, professional bodies, employers, training bodies (i.e. VET and universities), and individuals. These also apply to ACOLA and the Learned Academies.

We commit to developing and promoting disability responsiveness in our organisations and work. While we are not an education or training body, we will use our leadership role in Australia’s education and research landscape to encourage stakeholders to take action to be disability responsive in their professional and leadership capacities.

We acknowledge that there is no single solution or action to improve disability responsiveness. Ongoing effort is needed and often requires more than training. Changes to processes, culture, resources and leadership are also needed. Actions and priorities must be developed in collaboration with people with disability.

Against our report’s proposed Action Plan’s five key areas, we have identified our own areas of focus:

Active participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continue activities to increase the diversity of the Fellows, including people with disability. - Explore ways ACOLA and Academies can be preferred and inclusive employers.
Sector planning and actions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - As we develop policy advice, especially on the training system, ensure we engage with people with disability to consider their perspectives, reinforcing the principle of ‘nothing about us without us’. - To help us become more disability responsive, empower and support staff to identify and report any negative behaviours seen within our organisations, and undertake relevant training to support needs.
Training packages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Advocate that Fellows consider how the Good Practice Guide can be implemented in education and training within their professional environments. - Encourage all ACOLA and Academy staff to undertake disability responsiveness training, including understanding the intersection of disability with other personal attributes, such as, but not limited to, gender, race and sexuality. - Encourage the development of industry-specific resources, knowledge and tools.
Knowledge collection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote the findings of this project and suggest ways governments can continue to increase their knowledge of and progress toward a disability-responsive society. - Improve the accessibility of our work outputs for people with disability.
Government leadership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increase awareness of human rights by design in products, services and technologies, and assist governments, industry and society in understanding and “safeguarding” technology. - Engage with all governments on ways to support action, both as leaders and major employers of workers in the health, justice, education and social service sectors.

We encourage all stakeholders, especially in the education and training sector, to consider the project’s findings and develop their own response and action plan.

A copy of the project’s full report, including the Good Practice Guide and Action Plan, a summary report, easy read summary and Auslan translation can be found at <https://acola.org/disability-responsiveness/>.



¹ The five Learned Academies are: the Academy of the Social Sciences in Australia, the Australian Academy of Health and Medical Sciences, the Australian Academy of the Humanities, the Australian Academy of Technology and Engineering, and the Australian Academy of Science.