

# Enhancing Disability Inclusion in Tertiary Education

## Introduction

As stakeholders dedicated to advancing disability inclusion within tertiary education, we are seeking your input on the future of disability inclusion in the tertiary education sector. This briefing paper aims to give an overview of the current reform landscape as it pertains to the experiences of tertiary students with disability and provide important background information prior to your engagement in upcoming consultation activities.

Recent developments in tertiary sector and disability policy reforms demonstrate the evolving landscape of disability inclusion in tertiary education. They also provide valuable insights for our collective efforts towards improving the state of inclusion; supporting the tertiary sector to undertake impactful and evidence-based work; and supporting government to action meaningful change to support students with disability.

## The current reform landscape

The [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#), released in February 2024, outlines significant reforms aimed at creating a more equitable and effective higher education system. The reforms proposed in the Final Report aim to increase accessibility and support for students from historically underserved backgrounds, including students with disabilities: however, the Final Report does not address challenges including disability data collection; the persistently lower satisfaction and success rates of students with disability compared to their non-disabled peers; the need for a coordinated and centralised approach to inclusive and accessible practice in the tertiary education sector; or the many other barriers to the success of tertiary students with disability.

Additionally, the [Employment White Paper titled "Working Future"](#) released in September 2023 articulates a vision for a dynamic and inclusive labour market, addressing issues such as skill shortages and employment barriers for disadvantaged groups. The paper states that up to 9/10 jobs in the future will require a post-secondary qualification. The recent [NDIS Review Final Report](#) focuses on improving support systems and services which allow people with disability to be included and supported in mainstream employment and educational settings. Together, these publications underscore the importance of the continuation of work towards improving the state of inclusion for students with disability.

Finally, the [Disability Royal Commission's Final Report](#), released in late 2023, presents comprehensive recommendations to prevent violence, abuse, and neglect against people with disability and promote inclusivity across sectors. These recommendations emphasise the importance of addressing systemic barriers and promoting the safety and human rights of people with disabilities, including students.

## The future of ADCET and tertiary sector inclusion

Amidst these developments, the [recent reduction in funding availability](#) for the Australian Disability Clearinghouse for Education and Training (ADCET) demonstrates the vulnerability of initiatives supporting disability inclusion in tertiary education. ADCET has historically driven a unified and coordinated approach to disability inclusion in university, TAFE, and RTO environments; supported the disability practitioner workforce in these spaces; contributed to the development of an evidence base and proliferation of good-practice; and worked with education and government stakeholders to improve the state of disability inclusion in tertiary education. ADCET is an example of where higher education and VET stakeholders have regularly collaborated to the benefit of each part of the tertiary sector: in an environment where such collaborations are becoming a policy priority, retaining this harmonised approach is key to future success.

It is integral that we establish and support sustainable structures to safeguard progress in this crucial area, and maintain the economies of scale that result from a central, harmonised location for these priorities. There is a growing interest in exploring the potential benefits of establishing a new centre dedicated to coordinating these efforts in disability inclusion within tertiary education. Such a centre could facilitate barrier-free, equitable collaboration, resource sharing, and capacity-building initiatives among universities and stakeholders, contributing to a more cohesive and sustainable approach. It could adopt the project work previously undertaken by ADCET which is no longer funded, as well as additional work as identified by stakeholders to be gaps in the coordination of systemic disability inclusion in tertiary settings.

## Next steps

As we prepare for forthcoming consultation activities (surveys, meetings, focus groups) we are ensuring that all stakeholders are informed about the current reform landscape and its implications for disability inclusion in tertiary education. We want to hear what you think about the future of tertiary sector inclusion for students with disability. By leveraging collective expertise and resources, we plan to facilitate discussions that foster collaboration and drive positive change.

Please contact [Ebe.Ganon@utas.edu.au](mailto:Ebe.Ganon@utas.edu.au) or [Darlene.Mclennan@utas.edu.au](mailto:Darlene.Mclennan@utas.edu.au) if you have any questions or wish to register your interest as a stakeholder in this process.

# Improving Disability Inclusion at University and TAFE (Plain English)

## Introduction

We want to form a new Centre to make university and TAFE more inclusive for students with disability.

This paper is to help everyone understand recent changes in policies affecting students with disability.

We want to make sure everyone understands this so that we can talk about what we need to do in the future.

## Changes and government reports

New reports from the government show how universities and TAFEs need to change to include more people with disability.

The Australian Government wrote the Australian Universities Accord Final Report. The Accord talks about making university and TAFE fairer for everyone. The Accord wants to help students from different backgrounds, including those with disability. But it doesn't cover everything, like keeping track of data on disability or making sure students with disability do as well as other people.

A recent government paper about employment talks about jobs in the future. The paper says that education is going to be important for everyone.

The NDIS Review talks about helping people with disability in everyday life. The NDIS Review shows us that we need to do better to support people with disability to be included in the community.

Lastly, the Disability Royal Commission talks about making sure people with disability are safe and included everywhere, including at university and TAFE.

## ADCET and the future

Funding for the group that helps with disability inclusion at university and TAFE, called ADCET, has been reduced. We need to find a way to keep this work going.

We're thinking about starting a new group to help with disability inclusion at university and TAFE. This group could help share ideas and resources between universities and TAFE. It could also pick up where ADCET left off and fill in any gaps.

If you have questions or want to be part of the discussion, email us at [Ebe.Ganon@utas.edu.au](mailto:Ebe.Ganon@utas.edu.au) or [Darlene.Mclennan@utas.edu.au](mailto:Darlene.Mclennan@utas.edu.au).