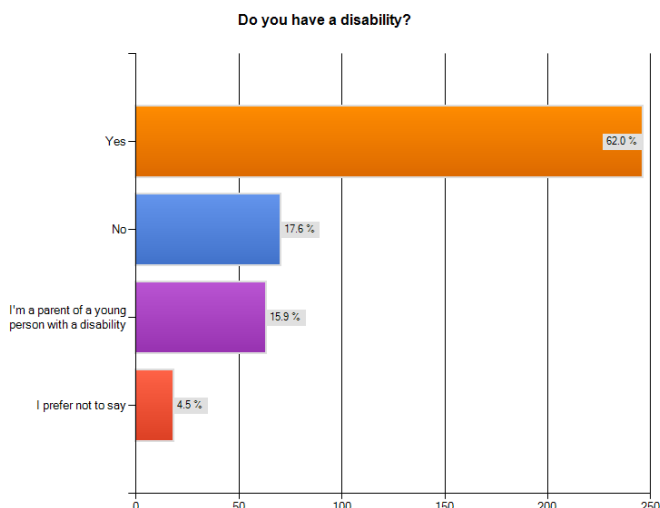


**Australian Youth Affairs Coalition Survey Results:  
“Your Views on Young People with a Disability and Education”  
May 2011**

In April and May 2011, the Australian Youth Affairs Coalition (AYAC) consulted directly with young people and parents of those with disability via an online survey entitled *Your Views on Young People with a Disability and Education*. The poll surveyed 397 people, asking them about their perceptions of the Disability Standards for Education, and whether young people with a disability experience equal opportunity to access and participate in education free from bullying and discrimination.

Five years ago the Federal Government implemented the Disability Standards for Education that were designed to clarify the rights of students with disability to access and participate in education and training, and give education providers more guidance on how to meet their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. The Government is currently conducting a review into the effectiveness of the Standards.

The AYAC survey reflected the views of all States and Territories across Australia and from all age groups, with young people 16 to 26 years of age among the largest group of respondents.



Most of those who took the survey were young people with disabilities (62%), followed by parents of those with disability (15.9%).

*“I think the only way people with disability will be respected by people without a disability is if they have to live a week in their shoes.”*

– Survey respondent

**Awareness of the Disability Standards amongst young people and parents**

When asked whether people had actually heard of or understood the Disability Standards for Education, the results were not encouraging. Of the total respondents, only 43% said that they had actually heard of the Disability Standards. Looking more closely at the respondents who had disability - and therefore require a greater level

of awareness of the supports and services available to them - only 57% said that they were aware of the existence of the Disability Standards.

*“Make sure students with disability know about their rights and what options are available to them. Not telling them you have a disability so you can't do X, Y or Z.”*

– Survey respondent

Just over half (52%) of parents of children with disabilities said that they were unaware of the Disability Standards for Education. The respondents who identified as having a disability and were aged 20-23 years – and therefore at an age where they would be most likely to need access to tertiary education or specialised training - 62% were unaware of the existence of the Standards.

The figures are more startling when it came to making a complaint under the Disability Standards. A significant proportion (41%) of respondents with a disability said they did not know how to make a complaint or who to make a complaint to, following a breach of the Standards.

*“Educate staff about the rights and the problems of students with a disability. Educate students about the rights and the problems faced by students with a disability. Educate students with a disability about the reasonable adjustments they are entitled too, and how to make the most of them. Significantly increase funding to disability services within the university.”*

– Survey Respondent

*“Young people with disabilities need initiatives to improve their confidence, know that it's OK to seek help, be aware that their "pride" will hinder them from getting the support they require. They need to know that they too have a right to quality education, which will give them more career opportunities. Each university's career advisor should work towards developing partnerships with employers to secure paid employment for their disabled students with mainstream employers and equal pay.”*

– Survey Respondent

*“People with disabilities should be included and made aware of what assistance is available and how to access that assistance...also there should be a plan in place to deal with bullying against people with disabilities.”*

– Survey Respondent

## **Bullying: a major problem facing students with a disability**

Young people are specifically protected from bullying and harassment under the Disability Standards. Yet, when asked whether their education provider had a system to help stop bullying or discrimination, over half of respondents with a disability (54%) were either unsure or said that there was none. Of the parents of these students, the results were more worrying, with 61% reporting that they did not know of any such systems in their child's school or university.

*"Bullying affects people whether they have a disability or not, after you have been bullied it is too late as the damage is already done. Tolerance should be taught and a no tolerance should be brought into schools for pupils that bully!"*

- Survey respondent

When asked whether their education provider educated teachers and students about the wrongs of bullying of students with a disability, 55% of students with a disability and 65% of parents disagreed or were unsure.

When asked whether their school or university would take the right action in the case of bullying or discrimination, 54% of all respondents disagreed or were unsure, while a larger percentage of parents again (62%) disagreed or were unsure.

When asked whether their school or university made it known how to make a complaint regarding bullying, over half of all respondents disagreed or were unsure.

Overall, AYAC's survey reveals that many education providers are failing to uphold the rights of young people with a disability and protect their rights against harassment and victimisation.

*"I've been bullied constantly at uni, to the point where I'm totally isolated and stigmatised by other students and I feel as if I'm just not good enough to study anymore. My mental health has declined to a point where I feel like I'm just hanging on by a thread at the moment, its been one of the worst experiences of my life."*

- Survey respondent

## **Education providers not providing "reasonable adjustments"**

Under the Disability Standards, all people have the right to seek admission and enrol on the same basis as prospective students without disability including the right to reasonable adjustments. All students also the right to reasonable adjustments to ensure that, once enrolled, they are also able to participate in education and training.

*"The current programs in primary and high schools are not adequate. There needs to be more time and money spent on testing, especially for exam conditions. In year 12 I had to do a test to see if I was able to get a scribe in the HSC but these tests were designed for young children. This made me feel very disabled."*

- Survey respondent

When it comes to schools and training institutions making "reasonable adjustments" to make sure that students with disabilities can enroll without difficulty, many parents (55%) reported that their child's school did not necessarily make changes to make

enrolling easier, and many (52%) did not necessarily treat their child equally when deciding on enrolments. When asked whether their child's school made "reasonable adjustments" to ensure inclusion and participation in learning, 42% of parents disagreed.

*"I was asked to leave several of my schools because the schools didn't think my needs could be accommodated. One was a private school, one a selective school. I had to hide my disability from TAFE in order to enrol. Later when I had proved that I was a good student, I told them about the extent of my disabilities and they said they wouldn't have let me enrol, but were glad that I had because I got the best results in the HSC that they'd ever had. It was a real struggle through the bureaucracy though."*

-Survey respondent

*"What we need is more funding. Better organised services. Universities and TAFE need to provide adaptive software, as this is an enormous expense for students. I was recently asked to purchase a program for \$1000 to scan my own documents. I am on a low income. Alternative formatting and other services need to be provided on time, eg. week 1's readings before week 1, not in week 7."*

- Survey respondent

Over 35% of parents said that their education provider did not even check with them about what kinds of adjustments and support their child needed to effectively enrol. And 45% of parents said that their child's school did not check with them throughout the school year to ensure their child had the support and equipment they needed to enable them in learning activities.

When asked about their child's right to participate in relevant supplementary courses and programs, 47% of parents said that their school did not consider whether their child's disability would affect their inclusion or involvement in these kinds of activities.

*"I want to be treated like a normal person and included...I also want reasonable adjustments for my assessment tasks and exams...which I did not receive."*

- Survey respondent

### **Necessary support services often not available for disabled students**

*"I think the main issue in education is dignity. As a high school student with a disability I found that oversights in my provisions directly resulted in a loss of dignity. Is it really so hard for teachers to provide me with the same learning material as the rest of the class in a RELATIVE OR USABLE FORMAT at the SAME TIME as other class members? Teachers constantly forgetting to prepare my alternate materials BEFORE class always ate into class time and I often accepted small print material just to get on with the class and to appease my impatient classmates."*

-Survey respondent

Student support services are essential if students with a disability are to ever genuinely claim their right to receive an education on the same basis as students without a disability. An alarming 63% of the parents of disabled students surveyed were unsure or disagreed (43%) that their child's school offered general support

services. This lends strong support to AYAC's concern that education providers are not complying with the right to specialised services that are essential for most, if not all, students with a disability, to enable them to participate in essential learning activities. Particularly striking is the 71% of parents who professed uncertainty or who simply disagreed (46%) that their child's school provided specialised support services.

*"Recognise that a non verbal learning disability is actually a disability. I feel that my UAI was severely diminished from what it should have been due to not having disability support and this (unfortunately) changed my future options of study."*

*"It would be nice for teachers to understand the effects of disabilities. And to not feel discriminated against by teachers."*

### **How can the Standards be improved to assist students?**

The following are some of the comments made by the survey respondents in response to the question "What would you change to make the current education system better for young people with a disability":

*"Less discrimination, bullying and more respect, less prejudice and rude remarks about people with disabilities."*

*"More assistance from disability services [university]. This year they have made it too hard for anyone to get any kind of support or help. They have told us to deal with the academics by ourselves and it's really hard when communication is a major part of my disability (especially with people I don't know)."*

*"Do something about the levels of bureaucracy involved when seeking special provisions, eg. having to speak to three different people and/or have them sign off on the provisions individually."*

*"One of the biggest issues for supporting students is being able to access items / tools which can help them learn - which requires adequate funding."*

*"More input from actual people with disabilities. Specifically, physically accessible buildings and education for the staff on a number of inclusivity issues- people with disabilities are also women with disabilities, people of colour with disabilities, trans people with disabilities, queer people with disabilities, fat people with disabilities. And sometimes discrimination on the basis of the other facets of our identities can exacerbate some of our disabilities..."*

*"To educate that disability isn't by definition the blue and white wheelchair logo. Disability comes in many other forms. Just because a person is not physically in a wheel chair, doesn't hide or better the fact that mental illness, chronic pain etc that would otherwise make a person look "normal" is very much a disability affecting every second of our live..."*

*"Encourage youths with any disability to seek help and of information about what changes can be done to help them out. Make it clear that it is ok to seek help and that you won't be discriminated against."*

*"A complete and thorough awareness program for ALL academic staff about disability and the validity of reasonable adjustments and special support services for disability students".*

*"Let young people be involved in saying what sorts of support they need based on their own individual learning styles and needs."*

*"I had to ask for outside help from [an external disability service] with my son's school because we had so many problems and I didn't know how to push them any further. They experienced exactly the same problems as me - it would take weeks for the school to respond for our plea for help, we would have a meeting to put an action plan into place but within a week it would all fall apart, there was no communication between staff. In this last term he was at school for 1.5 hrs per day three times a week and even that was failing. We have now applied for an exemption from school and he has found casual employment as the emotional toll on all of us came to breaking point."*

*"The adjustment made to the Education Act more recently to allow students with Dyslexia to access inclusion funding was fantastic but...what is done with this funding is far short of what is needed. My daughter had a right to fair and reasonable adjustments to allow her to access her education. Although this is hard to quantify the fact that the adjustments fell short and resulted in her leaving school despite being very engaged and willing to learn is a sad reflection on the education system."*

*"This policy needs to be focused on in-house training at schools. Most teachers do not seem to know anything at all about the content of this policy and that this is a legal requirement of all teachers".*

**For further information please contact:**

Maia Giordano  
Deputy Director (Young People)  
0435 496 494  
maia@ayac.org.au

