Voluntary Organisations Disability Group

VODG
AI Leadership Academy
April 2027 to March 2028



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Lead with confidence in the age of AI

A 12-month leadership and organisational development programme for disability organisations that want to understand AI, build organisational confidence and make responsible, evidence-informed decisions about where and how it can add value.





Working alongside disabled people. Learning and leading together

Rooted in VODG's purpose

VODG is a membership body representing voluntary organisations that work alongside disabled people. Our members support disabled people of all ages to live the lives they choose. Our role is to help members achieve excellence, learn from one another and respond collectively to a changing operating environment. We bring people, ideas and experience together to strengthen the voluntary disability sector. arrangements vary across the sector.

Why the Academy belongs under the VODG umbrella

The AI Leadership Academy applies our membership purpose to one of the most significant leadership questions facing organisations today: how to understand, govern and use AI in ways that strengthen organisations, support their workforce and improve outcomes for disabled people.

Technology will continue to change, but the fundamental leadership questions remain:

- **What are we trying to achieve?**
- **Who could be affected?**
- **What evidence do we need?**
- **What safeguards should be in place?**
- **And how do we make responsible decisions that remain grounded in our purpose?**

The Academy creates the space, structure and shared learning for VODG members to work through those questions together.

Developed with our Members

Shaped by Member conversations. Convened and supported by VODG

Why Members asked for something different

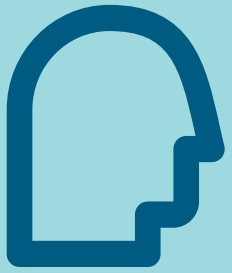
The VODG AI Leadership Academy has grown out of a much wider conversation with our membership about what leadership needs to look like as AI becomes part of everyday organisational life.

Over the past year, VODG has been listening carefully to members through **one-to-one conversations with chief executives and senior leaders, our professional networks, leadership discussions and events, and wider conversations with digital, transformation and sector specialists**.

This has allowed us to hear from organisations at very different stages, from those beginning to consider what AI might mean for them to those already exploring governance, organisational adoption and practical use.

This work has taken place alongside **Stronger Together 2026**, VODG's wider programme of member listening and research undertaken with independent researchers **Membership Matters**. The Stronger Together work has explored members' changing needs, priorities and expectations and is helping to shape VODG's future direction and services.

AI has also increasingly surfaced through VODG's wider leadership conversations. Previous conference and leadership activity has explored AI not simply as a technology issue, but through the questions it raises about **governance, productivity, risk, workforce, organisational change and relationships with the people organisations support**.



Across these conversations, a clear message has emerged: **members do not need another generic course telling them about AI or teaching them how to use individual tools**.

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They used the space to understand what AI means for their organisation, ask better questions and decide what responsible progress looks like in their own context.

Chief executives and boards are grappling with organisational readiness, governance and accountability, investment and pace, workforce implications, accessibility, service models, risk and where AI could create meaningful value for disabled people.

Members have also told us they do not want to navigate those questions in isolation. There is a strong appetite for trusted peer learning, where organisations can compare approaches, share what they are learning and avoid each organisation having to solve the same problems independently.

That insight fundamentally changed the proposition.

What began as thinking about an AI learning programme has developed into a **year-long organisational development journey**. It brings together an Executive Sponsor and Implementation Lead from each organisation, gives them a real organisational priority to work on, and combines trusted peer learning, specialist expertise, practical organisational work and evidence-led decision-making.

The leadership-pair model, the focus on one shared organisational priority, the emphasis on governance and assurance, and the expectation that organisations leave with tangible outputs have all developed from that listening and testing.

The Academy has not been designed around AI technology. It has been designed around what VODG members have told us they need to lead well as AI changes the environment around them.

From listening to action



VODG's Role in the Journey

The VODG AI Leadership Academy has grown out The Academy is not something VODG will simply launch and leave organisations to navigate.

Throughout the 12 months, we will work alongside the founding cohort: **bringing members together, listening to what is emerging, connecting organisations facing similar challenges, identifying and bringing in specialist expertise where it adds value, and adapting the learning as the cohort's needs develop**.

We will support leadership pairs to keep their learning connected to their real organisational priority and create opportunities to share what is working, what is proving difficult and what others can learn from that experience.

We will also turn that collective learning into something lasting through the **Academy Knowledge Resource**, building a practical body of tools, guidance and member insight that grows with the programme and continues to support VODG members afterwards.

Our role is to make sure members do not have to navigate this rapidly changing landscape alone.

We will provide the trusted environment, connections and expertise that help organisations make their own well-informed, responsible choices.

What participation makes possible?

Leadership Confidence
Better questions, stronger judgement and shared organisational understanding

A Real Strategic Priority
One meaningful issue defined and explored with evidence

Sector-Specific Assurance
Governance, accessibility, risk and judgement considered within the context of voluntary disability organisations

Practical Organisational Progress
Learning translated into activity and decisions within your organisation

Learning That Lasts
Peer relationships, practical resources and a clearer route forward

Who is the Academy for?

The Academy is designed for **voluntary organisations working alongside disabled people** that want to move beyond general conversations about AI and develop a more confident, organisation-wide approach.

You do not need to be advanced in your use of AI to take part.

Participating organisations may be at very different starting points, from beginning to explore what AI could mean for them to testing particular approaches or strengthening existing governance.

What matters is a willingness to:

- **identify a genuine organisational priority;**
- **involve colleagues and, where relevant, disabled people affected by the work;**
- **explore opportunities and risks openly;**
- **gather evidence rather than assume AI is the answer; and**
- **commit two leaders to learning and working together throughout the Academy.**

Each organisation participates through an **Executive Sponsor** and an **Implementation Lead**, connecting strategic leadership with practical organisational change.



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Why AI leadership matters now

Opportunity, assurance, pace and resilience belong in the same conversation

Our members are asking where to start, what has real value and how to move without creating unnecessary risk.

AI may help organisations think, plan, use evidence, communicate and support their workforce. It is also changing how disabled people, families, staff and commissioners find information and interact with services.

Leaders need to consider both sides

Moving without sufficient assurance
Poor governance can expose sensitive information, create barriers, weaken trust or undermine human judgement. Dependence on particular systems may also create operational vulnerabilities.

Waiting while the world changes
Moving too slowly can also be costly. Changing expectations, AI-generated answers and new approaches to services may affect relevance, workforce capability and sustainability.

What responsible leadership adds

The challenge is not only technological.

Progress depends on leadership confidence, organisational culture, workforce involvement, accessibility, governance and the ability to learn and adapt while essential support continues.

Consider the risks of acting, the risks of not acting and the resilience needed to move forward responsibly.

A better-informed decision, not adoption for its own sake, is the measure of success.



Waiting while the world changes
Moving too slowly can also be costly. Changing expectations, AI-generated answers and new approaches to services may affect relevance, workforce capability and sustainability.

This is not an AI Course

The Academy is a structured leadership journey that helps organisations understand their starting position, choose a meaningful priority, establish proportionate assurance, explore options, gather evidence and make a responsible decision about what happens next.

It is not built around particular products, platforms or suppliers.

Organisations will not be expected to implement AI simply because they have joined the Academy.

AI may be part of the answer. It is not assumed to be the answer.

Success might mean identifying an opportunity worth pursuing. It might mean changing an organisational process before introducing technology. It might mean undertaking further testing. And it might mean making an informed decision not to proceed.

The aim is better organisational judgement.

From uncertainty to confidence



Each organisation identifies one meaningful strategic priority, defines the organisational issue beneath it and agrees the question the Academy should help answer.

A leadership pair with complementary responsibilities



Chief Executive or Equivalent Executive-Level Leader
Connects learning to strategy, governance and investment. Provides direction and sponsors organisational decisions.



Leader From a Relevant Organisational Function
Involves colleagues, coordinates practical work, gathers evidence and helps turn learning into action.

Together, the leadership pair connects strategic decision-making with what is happening across the organisation.

The four-stage organisational journey



01 Assess & Define

Months 1–2
Clarify the starting position, organisational readiness and priority.
Output: Starting Position and Priority Statement



02 Lead & Govern

Months 3–5
Agree boundaries, accountability and an evidence plan.
Output: Academy Terms of Reference and Assurance Framework



03 Test & Learn

Months 6–9
Explore options, undertake proportionate practical activity, gather evidence and learn.
Output: Evidence and Learning Record



04 Decide & Plan

Months 10–12
Review the evidence, make an organisational decision and agree what happens next.
Output: 90-Day Action Plan and Longer-Term Roadmap

The Programme Experience

A supported journey alongside people facing many of the same questions.



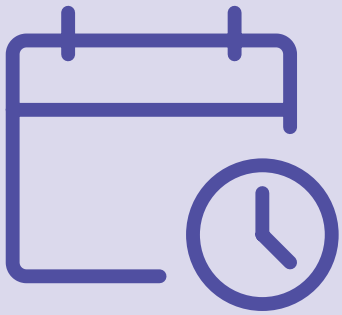
Learning together, applying it locally

The 12-month Academy will combine **four in-person events** with online learning, role-specific and shared development opportunities, specialist contributions and practical activity within each organisation.

The balance of activity will be shaped as the detailed programme develops and in response to the needs emerging from the founding cohort.

Prepared before the first event

VODG will contact organisations about pre-work and hold an individual organisational onboarding conversation to understand each organisation's starting position and help agree its priority.



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Space for honest learning

Participants will have space to explore uncertainty, learn from attempts that did not produce the expected result and exchange experience within VODG-specific confidentiality arrangements.

The learning continues between sessions

Leadership pairs will involve colleagues, explore their priority, test assumptions and return to the cohort with evidence, questions and practical learning.

This is where Academy learning becomes organisational learning.

The full programme calendar and required pre-work will be shared before the Academy begins.

What participation involves

Participating organisations will:

- **nominate an Executive Sponsor and Implementation Lead;**
- **take part in organisational onboarding and pre-work;**
- **attend four in-person Academy events;**
- **participate in relevant online and role-specific activity;**
- **identify one meaningful organisational priority;**
- **undertake proportionate work within their organisation between sessions;**
- **involve colleagues and other people where appropriate;**
- **gather and reflect on evidence; and**
- **share relevant learning with the Academy cohort within the agreed confidentiality arrangements.**

The Academy is designed to work alongside organisational priorities, rather than create a separate AI project.

Role-specific development

Executive Sponsor

Strategic judgement, trustee and executive confidence, investment, organisational pace and decision-making.

Implementation Lead

Organisational readiness, cross-functional involvement, evidence gathering and practical change planning.

Leadership reflection at the beginning and end of the Academy will help both leaders recognise progress in confidence, judgement and organisational capability.

Keeping disabled people at the centre



AI creates questions that are not only about efficiency or productivity.

Decisions may affect how disabled people access information, communicate, exercise choice, experience services, maintain relationships and interact with the organisations and people around them.

The Academy will therefore encourage organisations to consider **who is affected by a decision, how disabled people should be involved, what accessibility means in practice and where human judgement and human connection must remain central**.

This does not assume every organisation will involve people in exactly the same way. It means ensuring that decisions remain grounded in **rights, choice, accessibility and the lived consequences of organisational change**.

What leaders will learn

Six Core Learning Themes

01

AI Foundations and Sense-Making

Understand what is changing, distinguish credible developments from noise and identify the questions leaders need to ask.

02

Thinking and Leading With AI

Explore how AI can support analysis, challenge, scenario thinking and decision-making without outsourcing human judgement.

03

Governance and Assurance

Explore accountability, ethics, information governance, oversight and board confidence.

04

People, Culture and Accessibility

Consider workforce change, role design, inclusion, organisational culture and meaningful involvement of disabled people.

05

Practical Application

Compare options, consider sourcing, undertake proportionate exploration and evaluate whether and how an approach should progress.

06

Future Readiness and Resilience

Consider changing expectations, supplier dependencies, continuity, organisational resilience and future service models.

Readiness for responsible change

Good organisational decisions depend on more than selecting the right technology

What needs to be in place?

Cultural readiness
Are people able to question established practices, work across functions and learn safely when activity does not produce the expected result?

Accessibility and inclusion
How will decisions protect disabled people's rights, choice, privacy, accessible communication, meaningful relationships and access to human support?

Operational Resilience
What would happen if a platform, supplier or automated process became unavailable? How would essential services and accessible communication continue?

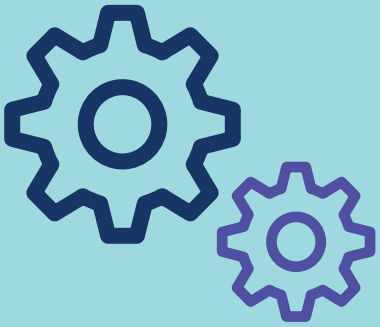
A practical question for leaders

If a critical system were unavailable for **24 hours, 72 hours or seven days**, which activities would be affected, what accessible alternatives would remain and who would make the decisions?

An evidence-informed starting position

The **Readiness, Culture and Resilience Assessment** helps organisations identify strengths, gaps and priorities across leadership, governance, workforce, data, accessibility and relevant dependencies.

This is a development tool, not a pass-or-fail ranking of organisations.



This is a development tool, not a pass-or-fail ranking of organisations.

Terms of reference and assurance

A shared, sector-informed approach that each organisation can adapt

Founding organisations will help develop the **Academy Terms of Reference and Assurance Framework**.

It will support clearer responsibilities, proportionate safeguards, human judgement and documented organisational decisions.

The Framework will address:



01 Purpose and Boundaries
Intended value, scope and limits



02 Executive and Board Roles
Accountability and decision authority



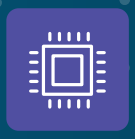
03 Human Judgement
Decisions that require human oversight



04 Accessibility and Involvement
Rights, choice and the involvement of people affected



05 Information and Ethics
Privacy, data and responsible use



06 Suppliers and Dependencies
Critical technology, supplier relationships and exit choices



07 Evidence and Continuity
Monitoring, alternatives and recovery



08 Escalation and Stop Criteria
When to pause, review, stop or reconsider an approach, and how decisions are documented

Resilience and dependency tools

Organisations can use proportionate tools to identify relevant suppliers, systems, workforce and operational dependencies.

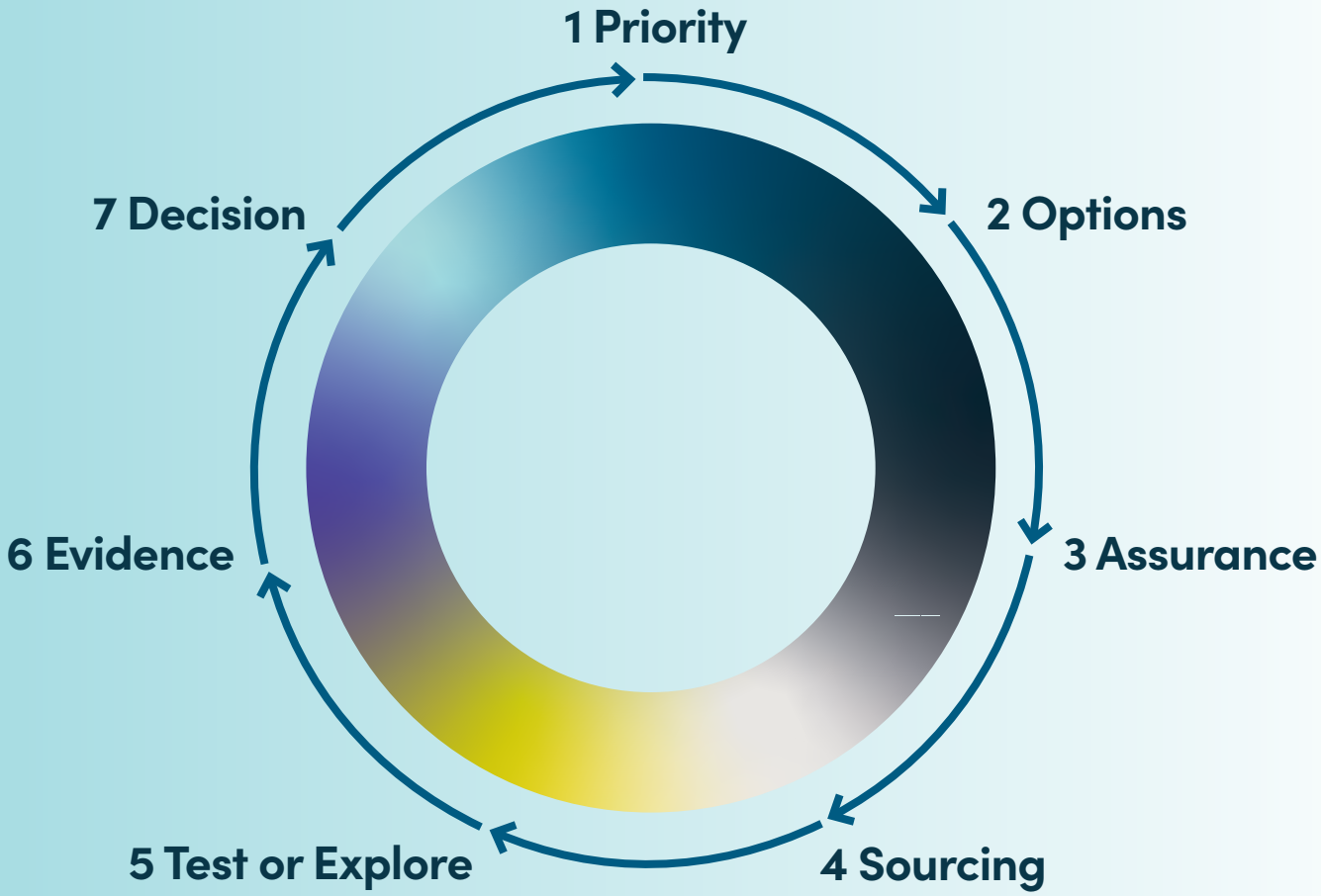
A separate dependency map is not mandatory for every participant.

The framework supports structured decisions; it does not provide certification, accreditation, legal advice or legal assurance.

From priority to evidence and action

The Four Stages organise the year. A Practical Pathway guides choices within them

A Practical Pathway from priority to decision



The Academy starts with the organisational priority, not a preselected technology

Practical activity may include options appraisal, process redesign, a structured assessment, a controlled test or gathering further evidence.

No AI tool is assumed to be the right answer.

What a better decision looks like

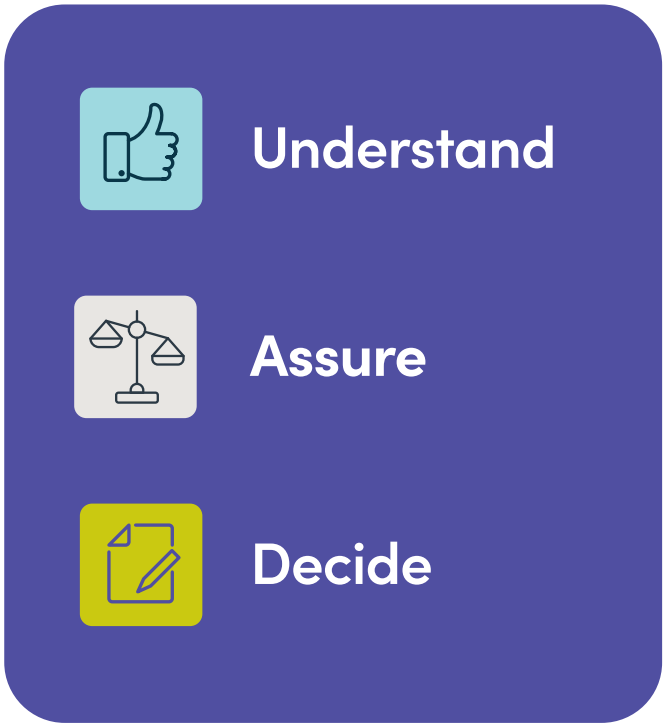
Understand
Bring together evidence, the experience of affected people and the implications for staff and the organisation.

Assure
Consider relevant governance, accessibility, human oversight, supplier and resilience questions.

Decide
Make and document a choice to stop, adapt, continue testing or scale, with clear ownership of what happens next.

Stronger judgement. Clearer evidence. A realistic route forward

The Academy will also capture sector-wide learning about changing expectations and service models.



What your organisation will come away with

More than learning. Practical outputs your organisation can share, adapt and use

01



A Clearly Defined Priority

Starting Position and Priority Statement

Connects one meaningful organisational issue to purpose, strategy, readiness and the people affected

02



Organisational Readiness

Readiness, Culture and Resilience Assessment

Highlights strengths, gaps, relevant dependencies and immediate priorities

03

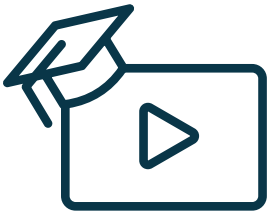


Terms of Reference and Assurance

Academy Terms of Reference and Assurance Framework

Supports proportionate oversight, clear boundaries and evidence-informed decisions

04

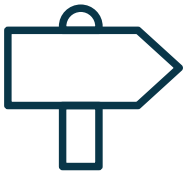


Evidence and Learning

Evidence and Learning Record

Captures what practical exploration showed, including evidence, uncertainty and lessons

05



A Decision and Route Forward

90-Day Action Plan and Longer-Term Roadmap

Documents the choice to stop, adapt, continue testing or scale, what happens next and who owns it

06



Shared Knowledge and Resources

Academy Knowledge Resource

VODG-maintained tools, guidance, resources and shared learning shaped through the Academy

Continuing value beyond the programme

The learning should not disappear when the formal Academy ends.

VODG will maintain and develop the **Academy Knowledge Resource**, bringing together useful tools, guidance, sector insight and learning generated through the programme.

Participating organisations will retain access beyond March 2028 while they remain VODG members.

Named organisational material and attributable learning will only be shared with permission.

The ambition is to create something that becomes more useful as the cohort learns together, providing a lasting resource for VODG members as AI and the wider operating environment continue to change.

Join the Founding Cohort

Help Shape Responsible AI Leadership Across the Voluntary Disability Sector.

Learning Together. Making Stronger Decisions for the Future.

April 2027 – March 2028
12-Month Academy

15–20 Organisations
Minimum 15 Contracted

Monday 19 April 2027
Opening Event: Microsoft, Paddington

Organisational Fees

VODG Members
£4,500 plus VAT per organisation

Eligible Non-Members
£7,500 plus VAT per organisation

Both fees cover participation for an Executive Sponsor and Implementation Lead from each organisation.

Non-members must be not-for-profit organisations that support disabled people.

Travel and accommodation are not included.Paddington

How to take part

Confirm participation by 30 January 2027

VODG will confirm in early February whether the minimum cohort has been achieved.

Organisations commit through the Academy terms and conditions. **A 14-day cancellation** period applies. After that, the full programme fee is payable, subject to activation of the Academy.

Join the Founding Cohort

Join the founding cohort and help shape an approach to AI leadership that is grounded in purpose, informed by evidence and built around the realities of voluntary disability organisations.

Academy Sign-Up
AI Leadership Academy Sign-Up

Terms and Conditions
AI Leadership Academy Terms and Conditions

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