UNSW Disability
Innovation Institute

UNSW SYDNEY

2025 Annual Review



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Institute

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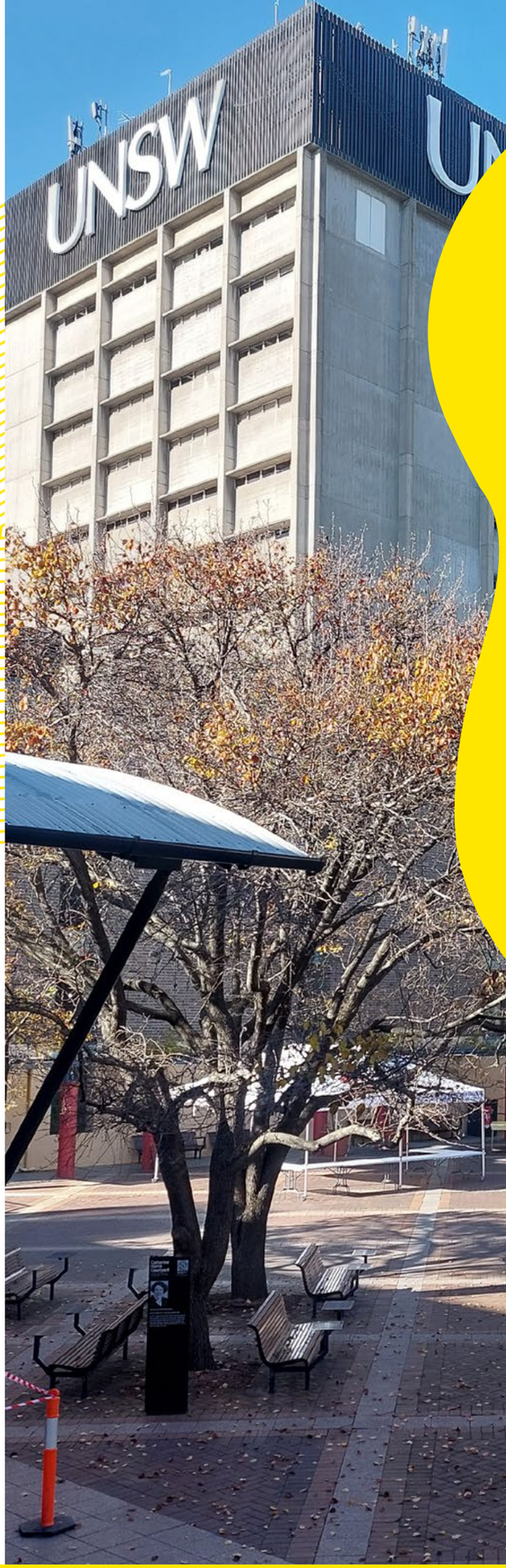
CRICOS Provider Code 00098G

UNSW acknowledges the Bidjigal people who are the Traditional Custodians of, and whose communities remain connected to, the unceded territories upon which the University's main campus is located.

Cover artwork by Emily Crockford,
Spunky Bush Trees



What's Inside:

Introduction	4
Letter from the Director	5
About the Institute	6
Meet the Team	7
Our Research	9
Current Projects	10
Seed Funding	17
Inclusive Education	18
Associate Program	19
International Engagement	20
Events	24
Governance	31
Get Involved	32
Contact Us	32

Introduction from Professor Verity Firth AM

Vice-President Societal Impact, Equity and Engagement

The Disability Innovation Institute UNSW (DIIU) exemplifies how UNSW's *Progress for All* strategy can be brought to life through interdisciplinary research that creates real, lasting societal impact. This Annual Review showcases the Institute's far-reaching work– spanning inclusive education, human centred research, community partnership, and global collaboration–and highlights how the DIIU translates high quality research into meaningful change for people with disability.

At its core, the DIIU is a model for how universities can embed inclusion into everything they do. Through co-production with people with lived experience of disability, the Institute challenges long-held assumptions and expands our collective understanding of what inclusive, equitable research looks like in practice. Its contributions strengthen UNSW's commitment to creating a place where every person can participate fully and flourish.

From groundbreaking research collaborations to inclusive education initiatives and community-led events, in 2025, the Institute continued to reinforce its reputation as an international leader in disability research. I'd like to in particular acknowledge the leadership of Professor Jackie Leach Scully, whose work this year extended across Australia and around the world. Jackie's expertise, advocacy, and strategic insight have played a critical role in shaping global networks and partnerships that amplify UNSW's impact.

As we look ahead to 2026, with DIIU's major projects such as the Disability Matters online symposium gaining momentum, I'm excited to see the Institute continue to catalyse positive societal outcomes, both locally and globally. My sincere congratulations to the DIIU team for an outstanding year. Your work demonstrates what Progress for All truly looks like in action, and I look forward to seeing what you accomplish next.

> "At its core, the DIIU is a model for how universities can embed inclusion into everything they do."

Letter from the Director



I'm delighted to be able to introduce the Disability Innovation Institute's Annual Review for 2025. It's a short Introduction, as I never like to take up people's time by summarising the contents of the Annual Review–you should get to reading it for yourself as soon as you can!

But it is an opportunity for me to thank everyone whose hard work and support over the year have contributed so much to the Institute's success. Let's start with all our Associates across UNSW, many of whom joined in the course of the year. Our Associates are a network of researchers interested in disability-inclusive research. We meet a few times a year at events where people can present their current work or future plans, can exchange ideas and discover mutual interests. DIIU Associates are also eligible to apply to the Institute's annual seed funding round.

I also want to thank the research assistants and fellows who undertake most of the work in the DIIU's own research projects. In 2025 these were Dr Rebekah Harms, Dr Jodi Lamanna, and right at the end of the year Dr Caroline Basckin. You can read more about their work in this Review and, as they continue with us into 2026, in next year's as well.

Our Academic Leads Professor Iva Strnadová and Professor Terry Cumming are equally vital to our work, in their respective areas of Research and Education. This year we have also been able to welcome Professor Alastair McEwin, working on a project to translate some of the recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission into concrete actions for UNSW.

Absolutely essential to the functioning of the DIIU are Lucy Sun, our Institute Manager, and Kate Vartuli, our Project Officer and Communications Manager. Their skills and their dedicated hard work lie behind our research, networking, and podcasts and other events. And we are grateful to the various kinds of support we receive from other colleagues within the Division of Societal Impact, Engagement and Equity, and across the university.

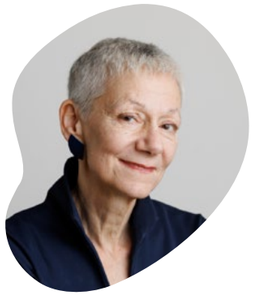
I wish you happy reading. And if anything piques your interest, please don't hesitate to get in touch with us to discuss your interests, potential webinars or podcasts on your work, or just to find out more about what we do.

Professor Jackie Leach Scully
February 2026

About the Institute

The Disability Innovation Institute UNSW works to produce sustainable change in the lives of people with disability by creating and sharing knowledge through research and education that is interdisciplinary, innovative, and inclusive. Our goal is to embed inclusive ways of thinking and working into the core of UNSW's research, practices, and engagement. We work in partnership with people with lived experience of disability to support various disability focused projects locally, nationally, and globally.

Meet the Team



Professor
Jackie Leach Scully
Director



Professor
Terry Cumming
Academic Lead Education



Professor
Iva Strnadová
Academic Lead Research



Professor
Leanne Dowse
Emeritus Professor



Professor
Alastair McEwin AM
Professor of Practice



Dr Jodi Lamanna
Research Associate



Dr Rebekah Harms
Postdoctoral Fellow



Lucy Sun
Institute Manager



Kate Vartuli
Project Officer

Our Commitment to Sustainable Change

The work of the Institute contributes towards the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) through its research, education and engagement, with a particular focus on **SDG 3** (Good Health and Wellbeing), **SDG 10** (Reduced Inequalities), **SDG 11** (Sustainable Cities and Communities), and **SDG 16** (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).



Our Research

Key focus areas:

- Disability Inclusive Research and Co-Production: Health, Wellbeing and Resilience
- Disability Resilience in Crises and Emergencies
- Advocacy and Policy
- Humanising Technologies for Disability

Our New Strategy

This year we launched a new strategy to strengthen our focus on the societal impact of our research and engagement activities.

The new **2025 DIIU Strategy** was developed in collaboration with our partners, researchers, and professional staff. This document outlines how we will achieve our strategic goals and how we will progress our vision of developing inclusive and interdisciplinary knowledge that enables people with disability to flourish and participate in society as equals.

The strategy is underpinned by the **UNSW Progress for All Strategy** and our ongoing commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The DIIU sits within the newly formed Division of Societal Impact, Equity and Engagement (SIEE), giving us greater access to specialised services and greater support for external engagement activities. Combined, these place the DIIU in a strong environment for success.

Current Projects

TARGeT: Theories of Autonomy in Reproductive Genomic Technologies

The **Theories of Autonomy in Reproductive Genomic Technologies** project ended in 2025, marked with a final project workshop held in December. Funded by the ARC, the initial stages of the three-year project were delayed due to COVID restrictions, extending the overall length of the research. Along with Jackie Leach Scully, key members of the research team were Professor Ainsley Newson and Dr Kate MacKay of the University of Sydney, and Professors Jan Hodgson and Ros McDougall from the University of Melbourne.

At the end of year workshop, the team discussed its findings with experts from the fields of reproductive healthcare, policy, and ethics. One of the key points is that both reproductive healthcare professionals and their patients face major challenges as expanded genomic testing in pregnancy produces magnitudes more information about the developing foetus, more quickly and cheaply–but this information may be uncertain and hard to interpret, making it less useful to parents making difficult prenatal decisions.

More information about the final publications from the project will be available in 2026.







Research Team: Prof Ainsley Newson, Prof Jackie Leach Scully, Dr Kathryn MacKay, Dr Rosalind McDougall, Prof Brenda Wilson, A/Prof Jan Hodgson, Dr Isabella Holmes.

Institutions: UNSW Sydney, University of Sydney, University of Melbourne, Memorial University of Newfoundland.

This project is funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery Project, grant DP200100006.

Ethical and Social Issues of Translating Epigenetics

The ARC-funded Discovery Project 'Ethical and social issues of translating epigenetics into pregnancy care in Australia' came to an end in December 2025. The team of researchers included Professors Catherine Mills (Monash University), Celia Roberts (Australian National University), Jackie Leach Scully and kylie valentine from UNSW, along with Associate Professor Jacqueline Boyle and Dr Rebecca Williamson, both from Monash University.

The project aimed to examine whether and how new epigenetic knowledge is being translated into antenatal care. From a disability perspective, the key question is whether there is a risk of epigenetics fuelling a new form of eugenic pressure on prospective parents, to maximize 'beneficial' epigenetic influences on their future child.

Over four years of work we combined literature review, media analysis, qualitative semi-structured interviews with experts and healthcare professionals, dialogue groups with parents, and ethnographic observations. Our extensive empirical research indicates that in fact, epigenetics is not yet being translated in a systematic way into pregnancy care in Australia, although there is intense public, professional, and policy interest in doing so. This is therefore an opportunity to pre-empt social and ethical issues in translation of epigenetics and lay the groundwork for optimal future antenatal care.

In March the project findings were presented to an Expert Group of healthcare practitioners, scientists, policymakers, and academic researchers to discuss how epigenetic knowledge might best inform antenatal care in Australia.

Research Team: Prof Catherine Mills, Prof Jackie Leach Scully, Prof kylie valentine, Prof Celia Roberts, A/Prof Jacqueline Boyle.

Institutions: UNSW Sydney, Monash University, Australian National University.

This project is funded by the Australian Research Council Discovery Project, grant DP210100111.

Ensuring Equity and Accessibility in the Integration of Artificial Intelligence and Automated Decision-Making in Engineering Biology

During 2025, we undertook a systematic literature review exploring ways that AI developers can mitigate bias in the field of engineering biology as part of a project co-funded by the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society and the Advanced Engineering Biology Future Science Platform at the CSIRO. We discovered that existing bias mitigation strategies generally fail to provide actionable guidance or empirical evidence about how to operationalise bias mitigation in real-world settings. To help fill this gap, we have been undertaking interviews with Australian scientists to understand how AI is impacting their work and what strategies they use to address potential forms of bias.

In a peer commentary published in the *American Journal of Bioethics* we also argued that developers are central to minimising bias in AI-enabled treatments, while in a special issue of *Frontiers in Public Health* we discussed some of the practical challenges that AI developers face in mitigating bias.

Our findings reveal several ways in which developers can build AI-enabled treatments that are free from bias and inclusive, including of those with disabilities, while raising important questions about how we assign responsibility for the ethical use of AI technologies.

Lead Investigator Dr Rebekah Harms presented the work through several channels, including the Advanced Engineering Biology Future Science Platform Workshop (Melbourne), the Australian BioCommons AI in the Life Sciences webinar (virtual), the Synthetic Biology Australasia Conference (Wellington, New Zealand), and the Next Generation Responsible AI Symposium (Adelaide).

Research Team: Dr Rebekah Harms, Prof Jackie Leach Scully, Dr Aditi Mankad, Prof Rachel Ankeny, Dr Lucy Carter.

Institutions: CSIRO, UNSW Sydney, Wageningen University & Research, Centre for Excellence in Automated Decision Making and Society.

Disability Matters

The key achievements for the first six months of 2025 for the **Disability Matters project** include a scoping literature review of Australian peer-reviewed literature between 2015 and 2025, and the drafting of content for the upcoming online methodology workshops.

The scoping literature review is in progress, led by Dr Jodi Lamanna. The premise for the review is to investigate the research methods used to ask people with disability about their health priorities in Australia. Preliminary findings show that in the existing studies, people with disability have not been asked specifically and directly about their health priorities. However, there are many researcher-led health priorities that people with disability have been asked about in projects where they have been involved as co-producers, co-researchers, and as participants.

The online methodology workshops are an exciting phase of the Disability Matters project at UNSW. There will be six workshops held over the next three to four years and will assemble knowledge on inclusive practices, co-production of health research, and what best practice looks like in health research and disability.

As part of the Disability Matters international project, there is an opportunity for early career researchers and PhD researchers to contribute to the **Disability Dialogue blog**.

This project is funded by the Wellcome Trust.



GeneEQUAL: Genomics Education Inclusive of People with Intellectual Disability

It has been another big year for the GeneEQUAL team who were awarded the People's Choice Award at the inaugural Australian Consumer Partnerships in Research (CPIR) Awards Finals in the Excellence in Consumer Partner Capacity Building category. This recognition is based on the public vote, highlighting the community impact of their work. The CPIR Awards, run by AccessCR Pty Ltd, were created to celebrate and showcase excellence in consumer engagement and involvement in health and medical research across Australia. AccessCR is a social enterprise dedicated to supporting the Community and Consumer Research Workforce (CCReW)–people looking for, taking part in, and contributing their lived experience to medical research.

The GeneEQUAL team was represented by Julie Loblinzk Refalo OAM, Skie Sarfaraz, Dr Elizabeth Emma Palmer and Professor Iva Strnadová, who presented their innovative approach to meaningful co-production with people with intellectual disability. Their work on the GeneEQUAL Toolkit –which provides accessible resources to help people with intellectual disability understand and participate in genetic research–is funded by NSW Health and demonstrates the power of authentic consumer partnership in research. The Disability Innovation Institute is a founding partner of the GeneEQUAL project.

Meet the **research team here**.



Seed Funding

The Institute partnered with the **Australian Human Rights Institute UNSW** to offer joint seed funding for a disability-related project that strengthens human rights research.

The Joint Seed Funding Scheme provides funding for disability-related projects that both strengthen human rights research and have the potential to contribute to a better quality of life for people with disability. The purpose of the seed funding is to establish or advance inclusive and interdisciplinary collaborations between UNSW academic researchers, people with disability, government, industry, and the wider community.

The 2025 recipient was Dr Maryann Barrington with her research project titled 'Sexual and reproductive rights for people with intellectual disability: Exploring stigma and attitudes toward contraceptive decision-making for people with intellectual disability'.

The project has made great progress throughout the year. Initial research findings already indicate that people with intellectual disability receive little to no sexual health education in school, nor do they feel encouraged to have discussions with healthcare providers.

Chief Investigator Dr Maryann Barrington stated that 'this project addresses a critically under-examined area of reproductive healthcare by illuminating how stigma, gatekeeping, and assumptions about sexuality shape the contraceptive experiences of people with intellectual disability. By grounding the research in inclusive methodologies and lived-experience partnership, the project ensures that the voices and priorities of people with intellectual disability guide both the inquiry and its emerging solutions.'

Next year, the project aims to recruit further participants to the study and work to provide training for medical professionals.

Research Team: Dr Maryann Barrington, Scientia Professor Julian Trollor, Associate Professor Patsie Frawley, Professor Karen Fisher, Dr Clare Boerma, Dr Janelle Weise, Dr Bronwen Merner

Institutions: UNSW Sydney, University of Melbourne, University of Sydney, Family Planning Australia

About the AHRI: The **Australian Human Rights Institute** produces world-leading research and advances debate on critical human rights issues. Through research, education and strategic collaborations, the Institute is committed to protecting rights, dismantling inequality, and fostering a culture of accountability where human rights abuses are challenged and rectified. **Click here to view their current projects**.



Inclusive Education

The Institute continues to foster greater accessibility in higher education through promotion of the Diversified Inclusive Teaching Toolkit and a new hub for resources. The Toolkit was developed by the Diversified Team, a collective of neurodivergent students and staff at UNSW. It offers practical tools to help educators understand the experiences of neurodivergent students and implement teaching strategies that foster engagement, accessibility, and success.

A new suite of pages on inclusion and equity were launched on the Teaching Gateway. It brings together a range of resources and information to make inclusive and equitable teaching easy to access. **You can access the Toolkit here**.

UNSW student Vivienne Tico Salcedo has created a comprehensive guide to 'Teaching Autistic University Students: A Guide for UNSW Educators'.

Combining rigorous research with her lived experience as an autistic student and academic, Vivienne has created a practical, evidence-based resource for university educators. 'As an Autistic student myself, I can't tell you how many little things make a big difference in my academic journey.' The guide addresses a critical gap in higher education support. Autistic student graduation rates have declined from 8.1% in 2018 to 5.2% in 2022. Vivienne's resource provides concrete solutions, such as strategies for group work facilitation or alternatives to traditional assessments. It comes with QR codes linking to additional resources and clear implementation guidance. The DIIU invited Vivienne to share this resource at the 6th Inclusive Education showcase in September.

Vivienne has created a practical, evidence-based resource for university educators.

Associates Program

This year we welcomed 15 new Associates to the program from across many different areas of the University. The continued growth of the program enables the Institute to broaden the base of disability research knowledge and interest across campus.

Associates share their understanding of inclusive research across faculties and open doors for new project ideas.

If you are interested in becoming an Associate, information about how to apply is available **here**.



International Engagement

Professor Iva Strnadová and her Czech colleagues have received substantial funding from the European Union for their project 'Together Beyond the Diagnosis'. This important work, supported through the Operational Program Employment+ Social Innovation call, tackles a serious problem: parents with intellectual disability have their children removed at alarming rates. Research shows that 40-60% of children from these families are taken into care, often without any evidence of abuse or neglect–simply because their parents have a disability. 'This is discrimination and violates the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,' says Professor Strnadová. 'Our project is the first step toward real change in how we support these families.'

Running from May 2025 to January 2026, the project will work with child welfare offices across four Czech areas to test better assessment tools. Instead of subjective judgments based on assumptions, social workers will use evidence-based approaches that focus on what families actually need.

What makes this project groundbreaking in the Czech Republic is that it involves parents with intellectual disability as advisors throughout the research. This inclusive approach ensures their experiences directly shape how new assessment methods are developed and tested.

The project team includes Dr Jana Bernoldová from Charles University Prague, Martina Macurová and Iveta Turková from CPKP střední Čechy, and Petra Konečná from Nebuď na Nule.

The project will create new assessment tools, training materials for social workers, and practical guidance for running inclusive case conferences. All materials will be made freely available so other regions in the Czech Republic can use them too.

Visting Professorship

Throughout May, Professor Jackie Leach Scully was on the road, giving a series of presentations and meeting with research partners from around the world. The first step on the journey was to Hong Kong, where she had been invited by Hong Kong University's Centre for Medical Ethics and Law to speak on 'Artificial Intelligence and Disability: How Can AI Promote Inclusion and Equity for Disabled People?' The presentation drew on the studies that Jackie has been leading, together with Dr Georgia van Toorn and Sandra Gendera, in the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society.

A few days later, Jackie flew from Hong Kong to Zürich, Switzerland, home of arguably the most beautiful landscape and certainly the best chocolate in the world. Jackie lived and worked in Switzerland for many years, and still maintains links with Swiss and German disability specialists and bioethicists. This trip included several meetings with colleagues in Neuchâtel, Basel, and Bern, either to discuss ongoing or planned collaborations, or to exchange ideas and knowledge about developing more inclusive approaches in disability research in the region. Disability studies is a relatively new discipline in most of Europe, and researchers are not always familiar with disability-inclusive ways of working, or with methods of co-production–here, the expertise of the DIIU is welcomed.



Teaching in Zürich

For some years now, Jackie has been invited annually to lead a three-day intensive training course on research ethics for graduate students at the Centre for Neuroscience (ZNZ) at the University of Zürich. While this is usually held online, as she was already in Switzerland this year's course could be run in person. Applications for the course are competitive, and numbers are limited to 20 students, all of them doing postgraduate research in some aspect of the neurosciences. The course, developed by Jackie, covers ethical principles, animal and human research, and a number of optional topics including the use of innovative and inclusive methodologies.

The DIIU koala on the beautiful campus of the ZNZ, where the buildings are surrounded by a public park with lakes and woodland, and wildlife including (at this time of year) ducklings and cygnets.



The DIIU koala on campus in Zürich

NNDR in Helsinki

Every two years, the Nordic Network on Disability Research (NNDR) holds an international conference in a different Nordic city. This year it was Helsinki, the capital of Finland. It was held over a packed two and a half days, with keynotes from major figures in disability studies, among them Professor Nora Groce, whose book *Everyone Here Spoke Sign Language* was a groundbreaking anthropology of an inclusive Deaf and hearing community. Other keynote speakers came from the worlds of academia, but also from disability law and human rights activism.

Each day was busy, with up to 17 or 18 parallel sessions to choose from, showcasing the diversity and quality of disability research in Europe and beyond. Jackie was part of a three-day stream focusing on digital technologies and disability. She presented on the work of the UNSW node of the ADM+S Centre; the interaction between people with disability and various forms of artificial intelligence is becoming a very hot topic in the field.

Northern Europe was hit by a sudden cold spell, and temperatures in Helsinki sank to around 5 °C (in the daytime). Nevertheless, the welcome of the Finnish hosts was very warm. Jackie was also able to meet current and former colleagues, including Rhea Halsey, UK-based project manager of the Wellcome trust-funded Disability Matters project, and Professor Janice McLaughlin, who is at Newcastle University (UK) and leads a major investigation into the transition of children and young people with disability into adult life. In conversation with Professor Patrick Kermit, the outgoing President of the NNDR, Patrick highlighted the fact that the DIIU is now recognised internationally for its innovative approach to disability and its consistent promotion of inclusive and co-produced disability research.

Events

Disability Inclusion in the Asia Pacific Region

To kick off the events calendar, the DIIU hosted an afternoon of interdisciplinary discussion on disability inclusion in the Asia Pacific Region, centred on UNSW's role in the global context. Lived-Experience Researcher Peter Palg Rumints shared findings from his scoping exercise into UNSW engagement in disability inclusion in the Asia Pacific. Mr Rumints is a UNSW Australia Awards Scholar from PNG with extensive experience as a leader in disability advocacy. **Peter's scoping report** outlines the key challenges, strategies, and future directions in promoting the inclusion, participation, and leadership of people with disabilities in research and partnerships. Key recommendations include developing evidence-informed policies, promoting inclusive education, and engaging people with disabilities as co-creators of knowledge.

The presentation was followed by a panel discussion featuring Professor Jackie Leach Scully, Faculty of Science Associate Professor Carlo Caponecchia, and Dr Gianfranco Giuntoli, with additional words from Professor Karen Fisher and Professor Anthony Zwi. The event highlighted the need to remove barriers to inclusion and improve accessibility for people with disability in education and employment in the Asia Pacific region.



DIIU Forum

In August, we brought together researchers from across the University and beyond to share their unique approaches to disability inclusive research. Twelve speakers shared insights into the benefits of inclusive research and how co-production strengthens their work. These reports spanned arts and media, healthcare, cultural studies, air travel, and education. Bringing together a diverse panel and audience base allowed for the cross pollination of ideas and greater networking opportunities.

Access the recording here.

Diversity Festival

UNSW holds a celebration of its extraordinary diversity in Spring each year. This Diversity Festival, we celebrated 'conversations that matter' by inviting bold, respectful dialogue and fresh thinking to explore belonging, identity, and inclusion. The week-long festival brought together community members, staff, students, and partners through various free activities across the University. We held two signature events for the festival.

Diversity Under Threat: Keeping Disability Rights on the National Agenda

Our provocation was 'Diversity is under threat. Regressive societal and political forces are targeting the values of inclusion, equity and accessibility, and in doing so are actively pushing back the hard-won advances of disability rights. What can we do to keep disability rights front and centre of societal progress?'

Former Disability Discrimination Commissioner and current Professor of Practice Alastair McEwin AM opened our event with a keynote address. Alastair spoke of the role language and dialogue plays in the political landscape and how so often political leaders cause harm through their words often affecting the disabled community. The panel discussion that followed, facilitated by Ebe Ganon, featured Professor Jackie Leach Scully and University of Sydney academic Dr Supriya Subramani. The panel interrogated the ideas of inclusion and diversity in the global context and answered many great questions from the audience.

The recording and transcript are available here.

Part of our Asia Pacific focus, The Fixim Sola project in Vanuatu

6th Inclusive Education Showcase

A long-standing tradition of the festival is the Inclusive Education Showcase, now in its sixth year. It brings together members of the teaching community to share current advancements in inclusive technologies and practices, and how to implement these in teaching practice.

Our speakers:

- Professor Terry Cumming
- Professor Jackie Leach Scully
- Dr Harriet Ridolfo
- Vivienne Tico Salcedo
- Professor Mira Kim
- Dr Geraldine Townend
- Dr Sarah Bajan
- Dr Anastasia Shavrova
- Dr Samantha Furfari

Access the full recording and transcript here.

SDG Showcase

With over 50 stalls and 20 presentations throughout the day, the Roundhouse was a hive of activity with representation from all Faculties and disciplines. DIIU Associate Dr Fatemeh Aminpour and her colleague Dr Maximilienne Whitby hosted a co-designed workshop for neurodivergent and neurotypical participants, to explore how friendly parts of the Sydney area are to visit. The workshop is part of their 'Neurodiverse-friendly public open spaces' project. Fatemeh opened the workshop by sharing their early findings from the study. Participants were then encouraged to discuss their experiences of public open spaces in Sydney and explore what could work better.

The DIIU held a stall throughout the day dedicated to promoting the Inclusive Research Guidelines, **which are available online**.



Podcast Series

In the first episode of the series Dr Maryann Barrington, a postdoctoral researcher at the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health, outlined her current research project aiming to improve preventive healthcare for people with intellectual disability in Australia.

The conversation touched on topics of discrimination in healthcare and the role institutionalisation has played in shaping modern models of healthcare systems. Maryann highlighted the need for better communication and support among healthcare providers, support workers, and people with disability.

The next guest to the podcast was Dr Emily Gaspar, a Fulbright scholar at Deakin University from Coastal Carolina University in South Carolina. Emily discussed her research, which builds on her PhD research project conducted in the US, exploring the employment experiences of disability services practitioners who also identify as disabled and who work at institutions of higher education in Australia.

The comparative research will build greater knowledge of how to enable more inclusive and accessible campuses. Emily also shared her approach to the qualitative research method she used, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), and discussed the role of disability justice in her work.

To celebrate **Diversity Festival 2025**, the third episode in the series highlighted the very important connection between disability and ageing. Dr Meghan Ambrens, from Neuroscience Research Australia, described some of the experiences common to both people with and without disability as they age, including ageism, and also the difficulties that people with disability particularly face. With a focus on her work on fall prevention, she discussed the importance of co-produced research and why projects that involve older Australians with disability are important now more than ever.

Written transcripts of each episode are also available on our website.

Student Art Competition

In October we launched the very first DIIU Art Competition! We invited students from across UNSW to submit artworks in response to the theme of Diverse Belonging. The theme encouraged students to reflect on their thoughts and experiences of disability, inclusion, and community, and to imagine futures where diverse belonging is actively created and sustained. Rather than framing disability as a barrier, the theme celebrated diverse bodies and minds as a source of strength, creativity, and innovation.

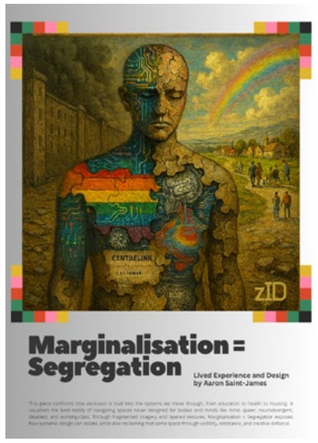
We received many outstanding works which were put to an adjudication panel of experts in both art and inclusion. It was a difficult process to select the winners as the works entered were all of such high quality. The winning entries were selected as the best examples of the theme, telling a strong story of lived experience in an expressive and impactful way.

Winners



Felix Smith

Again, Everything's Eventually Great



Aaron Saint-James

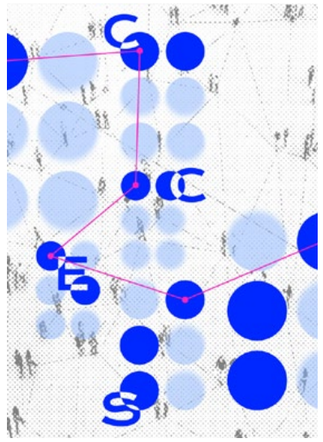
Fragments of Belonging: Marginalisation = Segregation



Ishaan Kapoor

The Hive Within

Highly commended



Ma Chengcheng

Access Code



Chaitali Gupta

Knitting inclusion

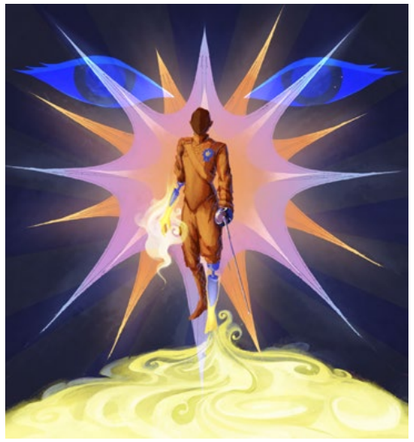


Britney Heng

Between the Blues

People's Choice Award

This was the opportunity for students of UNSW to select the work which they felt best captured the theme of Diverse Belonging. The work which attracted the most votes was Blue Ribbon Vision by **Aiko Simanjaya**.



View all the artworks online:
https://www.music.unsw.edu.au/DIIU-art-competition.

To celebrate the competition, we will be hosting a pop-up exhibition in March 2026 for the community to come and view the artwork in person. Hosted in the newly built Health Translation Hub Building the artworks will be on show for students, visitors and the local community to enjoy.



Governance

The work of the Institute is assisted by an Advisory Council of people external to the University. All members have wide knowledge of Australia's disability landscape, and the majority are disabled themselves. They provide a valuable external voice to ensure all work conducted by the Institute is reflective of the needs of the disabled community.

Internally, the DIIU is supported and advised by a Steering Committee, made up of members from across the faculties and Division and chaired in 2025 by Professor Bruce Watson.

The DIIU would like to thank both the Advisory Council and the Steering Committee for their ongoing dedication and contributions to the success of the Institute.

Diverse Belonging Art Exhibition working group



Get Involved

Subscribe to our newsletter to receive all the latest news from the Institute and access to upcoming events:
www.disabilityinnovation.unsw.edu.au/subscribe

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