



# Strategy 2025

## Disability Innovation Institute UNSW



UNSW  
Disability  
Innovation  
Institute



UNSW  
SYDNEY

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## Acknowledgement of Country

UNSW is located on the unceded territory of the Bidjigal (Kensington campus) and Gadigal (City and Paddington campuses) people who are the Traditional Custodians of the lands where UNSW is situated. We pay our deepest respect to the Traditional Custodians of the Lands and acknowledge Elders past and present.

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Spunky Bush Trees by  
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# Introduction

In Australia and across the globe, disability is on the rise as demographic shifts mean populations live longer and chronic disabling conditions become more prevalent.

Yet despite significant advances in disability rights over the last half-century, people with disability still experience discrimination and face major barriers to equality in education, employment and healthcare. These disadvantages are worsened in a global context marked by political instability, economic crisis, and the ongoing effects of climate change.

# The Disability Innovation Institute

The DIIU was originally established in 2017 with the aim of making UNSW a world leader in disability-inclusive research, innovation, and research translation. The Institute set out to create a critical mass of scholarship focusing on disability, establishing a network of involved and interested individuals and groups across the University.

Our explicit focus on inclusive, co-produced, interdisciplinary disability research is unique, and because of it the DIIU has built an international reputation as a leader in the theory and practice of disability-inclusive research and co-production.

The vision of the DIIU is to develop inclusive and interdisciplinary knowledge, through research and education, that enables people with disability to participate as equals in society and to flourish in their lives. Our mission is to embed disability-inclusive ways of working into the heart of UNSW, connecting researchers and educators with lived experience of disability locally, nationally and globally.



# Our view of disability

Disability is part of the human condition, to be encountered and engaged with rather than feared. We understand disablement to result from the interaction between people's impairments and the socioeconomic, cultural, material and political forces that hinder their flourishing and their participation in society on an equal basis.

Our current research addresses the challenges of disability inclusion in healthcare, education and employment; equity in the design and implementation of AI and ADM-based technologies; and security and resilience for people with disability in natural disasters and global emergencies, always with a focus on translating new knowledge into real and immediate outcomes with impact for practitioners, policy makers, and communities.

## DIIU structure

The DIIU is led by Director Professor Jackie Leach Scully. The core team consists of fractional Academic Leads in education and research, connecting to experts with international reputations in a wide range of disciplinary areas, including education, social policy, criminal justice, human rights law, and healthcare. A manager and project officer provide support to the Director and the team.

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### Note on terminology

The term currently preferred in Australia by disability advocates and in policy is 'people with disability'. Elsewhere in the world 'disabled people' is often used. As an international Institute the DIIU uses both terms.





# How we work

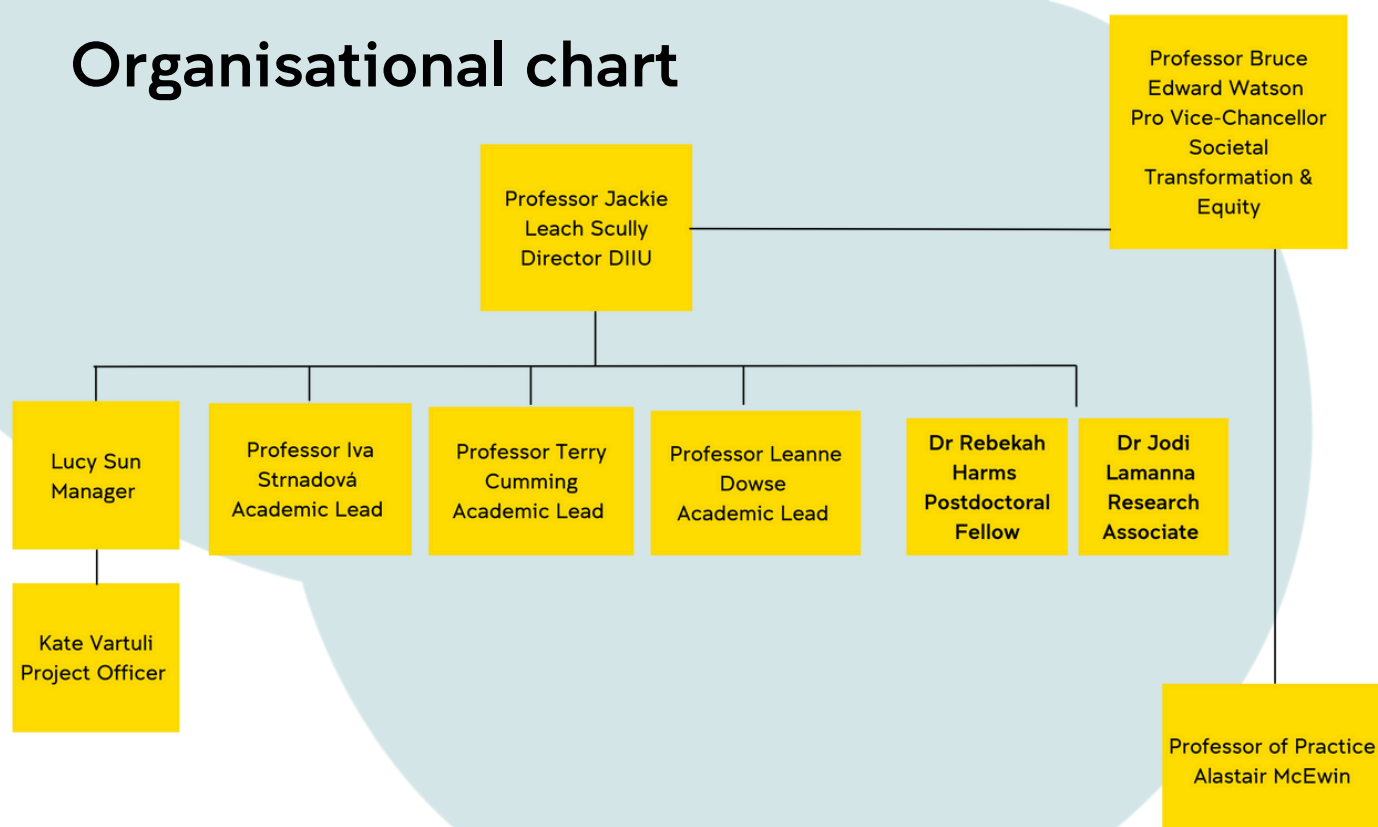
The DIIU was originally established in 2017 as a key part of UNSW's Strategy 2025, with the aim of making UNSW a world leader in disability-inclusive research and innovation, education, and research translation.

The DIIU is committed to a human rights-based, collaborative approach through three portfolios:

- The **research portfolio** builds capacity for high quality, disability-inclusive, interdisciplinary research through the Institute's own research and through facilitating the work of other researchers.
- The **education portfolio** uses educational pedagogy to increase UNSW's range of educational innovations related to disability, and to support the development of disability-inclusive teaching and learning across UNSW.
- **Research translation and knowledge exchange** directs the DIIU's engagement towards sharing knowledge to improve the lives of people with disability, locally and globally.

The Disability Innovation Institute is grounded in disability-inclusive research and co-production, where people with disability are involved not just as participants but as co-creators of knowledge.

## Organisational chart



# Our focus areas and strengths

To maximise our impact most effectively we align our efforts in areas where we are already strong and can lead the work into innovative directions in ways that are genuinely inclusive and produce outcomes that benefit people with disability.

Our focus areas include

- theory and practice of disability-inclusive research and co-production
- our research strengths in health, well-being and resilience; humanising technologies for disability; and disability resilience in crises and emergencies
- coordinating established and emerging researchers with an interest in disability
- forming partnerships within and beyond UNSW
- creating sustained and systemic change through evidence-based input to policy and practice.

# What we have already achieved

We have promoted disability-inclusive research and education within UNSW and externally, by

- using co-production within our own research
- providing guidance, advice and training to others on methods of disability-inclusive research and co-production, including with people with intellectual disability
- building future capacity by employing a fractional Inclusive Research Development Officer (IRDO) who supports the Institute's own work while receiving advanced training in disability-inclusive methods. In 2022/23 the role was held by Benjamin Garcia-Lee and in 2023/24 by Michelle Tso
- managing a competitive seed funding program to support disability-inclusive research accompanied by mentoring of potential and successful applicants.



- 17 projects seed-funded by the DIU
- 4 projects co-funded with the Australian Human Rights Institute and Allens Hub for Technology and Innovation



We have produced a coordinated range of materials to support people undertaking inclusive research, the Inclusive Research Guidelines.

They include:

- Doing Research Inclusively: Guidelines for Co-Producing Research with People with Disability (2020)
- Doing Research Inclusively: Co-Production in Action (2022)
- Doing Research Inclusively: Ethical Issues in Co-Production Research with People with Disability (2024) was commissioned by the National Disability Research Partnership to meet the needs of human research ethics committees asked to evaluate research proposals using inclusive or co-production methods, and of research teams applying for ethics approval.

Since 2020 the DIIU has attracted over \$1.7 million in research council external funding, as part of grants totalling over \$13 million, and has undertaken commissioned research to total \$187,000. We are linked to the ARC Centre of Excellence for Automated Decision-Making and Society (ADM+S), and partner with CSIRO, as well as international funding bodies.

We have disseminated our knowledge to a wide audience and provided thought leadership through publications, webinars Webinars, and podcasts Podcasts. We regularly host or contribute to public events.

Our education portfolio produced UNSW's Universal Design for Learning (UDL) Framework, and has hosted five Inclusive Education Showcases at the university's annual Diversity Festival.

We developed and support Diversified, a UNSW initiative dedicated to improving the lives of neurodivergent individuals in our community and beyond.

- Two ARC Discovery awards;
- One Medical Research Future Fund award;
- Two projects within the ARC-funded Centre of Excellence in Automated Decision-Making and Society, one co-funded with CSIRO;
- Two externally commissioned studies (NSW Health, DSS);
- Two international grants



We have established ongoing relationships with external partners that range from the United Nations Asia Pacific Office, to DPOs such as Women With Disability Australia, and Studio A, a Sydney collective of artists with intellectual disability.

Our research has provided the basis for numerous policy contributions, through an average of 5 submissions annually to Commonwealth, State, national bodies, or UN consultations; membership of Federal and state policy bodies and other organisations, and presentations at Federal Parliamentary Sessions. Professor of Practice Alastair McEwin has joined us in a project devising ways to translate the findings and recommendations of the Disability Royal Commission into systemic change that leads to greater societal inclusion of disabled people.

**Various workshops held with external research partners as part of the GeneEQUAL, TARGeT, Epigenetics, Disability Matters Projects, panels**





# How we align with UNSW Strategies

The DIIU was originally established as a key part of UNSW's Strategy 2025, aligning with the strategic priorities of academic excellence, social engagement, and contributing to disadvantaged and marginalised communities. Over time we have become an important and visible part of UNSW's commitment to equity and global impact.

The DIIU also contributes to UNSW's support of the UN's 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).

UNSW's forthcoming Strategy, Progress for All, explicitly places societal impact at the heart of the University's overall purpose. A key strategic principle is to amplify the positive societal impact of UNSW's research, education and engagement on a global scale.

The Strategy and the Societal Impact Framework together have nine Strategic Pillars. Several of these echo the DIIU's own areas of expertise, including accessible education; knowledge creation, innovation and translation; building networks locally and globally; advancing social prosperity; enabling healthy lives; and strengthening societal resilience and cohesion.

Through our commitment to disability inclusion and justice, co-production and transformative policy, and our track record of community engagement, the DIIU is key to translating UNSW's engagement with disability issues into societal impact.



# How we will achieve our Strategic Goals: A detailed view

Disability-inclusive research and co-production

Our strategic goal: The DIU is recognised as a leader in disability inclusive research practices

How we will do this:

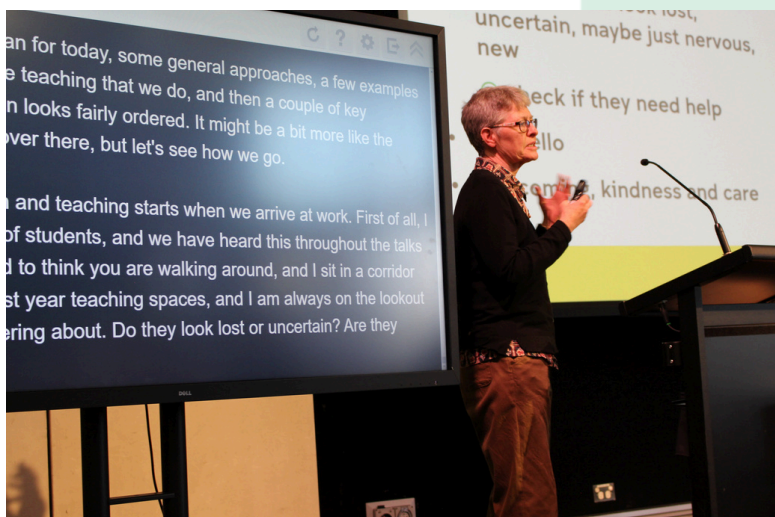
- continue the production of evidence-based inclusive research materials/guidelines
- work with external agencies, such as the National Disability Research Partnership, to produce further essential guidance; the pipeline includes establishing and managing a disability-focused Advisory Group for a research project, and best practice benchmarks for high quality inclusive research
- offer workshops and other training on inclusive research methods



- create and manage an international network of researchers interested in inclusive research
- use each new publication or event as an opportunity to promote DIU's unique expertise
- continue to build capacity through the Inclusive Research Development Officer program
- **we will need additional financial resources to support these measures sustainably.**

How we will measure progress:

- number of downloads/requests for guidelines, training or information
- audience for podcasts, webinars, and workshops
- partnerships with external agencies to provide training or advice.





# Our own research

The DIIU has three core research themes:

## Health, wellbeing and resilience

- we hold one major international grant (Disability Matters), two ARC Discovery awards, two Medical Research Future Fund awards (GeneEQUAL, LINEAGE), are funded for two commissioned short-term studies (NSW Health, DSS)

## Humanising technologies for disability

- an existing strength in AI-based technologies continues with new projects on equity, co-funded through CSIRO and the UNSW-hosted ARC Centre of Excellence in Automated Decision-Making and Society (ADM+S), and Stage 2 of a clinical trial of OrQA (Organ Quality Assessment tool), funded by NIHR, UK

## Our strategic goal:

**The DIIU is recognised as a home for internationally recognised research in our three core research themes.**

## How we will do this:

we will actively concentrate our research translation and cooperation initiatives within these three core areas.

## Disability resilience in crises and emergencies

- we collaborate with the Institute for Global Development and the Social Policy Research Centre in a number of projects connected to this theme, in Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Vanuatu, and the Philippines
- our research has informed regular input into workshops, panels and retreats for UN Resident Coordinators in the Asia Pacific region

## How we will measure progress:

- number of publications and invited presentations in the theme areas
- number of invitations for policy input, collaborations, or practical implementation of our findings.



# Seed-funded research

The goal of the seed funding program is to build UNSW's capacity in genuinely disability-inclusive research and co-production across UNSW. The application process is competitive, and funded projects are expected to work towards significant research outputs and/or acquire further grant funding. Applicants become Associates of the Institute, contributing to UNSW's disability research community.

In the past two years we have also collaborated with the Allens Hub for Technology, Law and Innovation and the Australian Human Rights Institute to offer joint funding to small disability related projects.

**Our strategic goal: UNSW has a community of high-quality, disability-inclusive researchers that includes the research leaders of the future.**

## How we will do this:

- continue to sole-fund one DIU-branded project per year
- support seed-funded researchers to build genuine collaborations with end-users and participants, a key criterion for gold standard inclusive research, by extending the funding period or other means
- actively seek partnerships with other centres or faculties at UNSW (eg medicine; bioengineering; Centre for Sex and Gender Equity in Health and Medicine) to broaden our sphere of support.

## How we will measure progress:

- number of outputs (publications or less conventional formats) or new funding obtained by seed-funded projects
- longer-term connections formed between UNSW researchers and DPOs or community groups
- number of new joint funding partnerships within UNSW.





# Education and training

**Our strategic goal: Input from the DIU enables all UNSW programmes to be disability inclusive and accessible, underpinned by the principles of Universal Design for Learning.**

The DIU undergraduate and postgraduate education portfolio works in collaboration with the PVCESE, individual Faculty and School Learning and Teaching leaders, Equitable Learning Services, and outside agencies to further inclusive teaching and learning through the incorporation of the principles of Universal Design for Learning.

## **How we will do this:**

- in partnership with Diversified, procure research funding to continue our work in the science of inclusive learning and teaching, with a focus on including the voices of neurodivergent students
- distribute the newly minted Inclusive Teaching Toolkit at UNSW and beyond
- host the 6th annual Inclusive Teaching Showcase
- continue to provide professional learning on neurodiversity and inclusive teaching
- actively seek partnerships with other HE groups focused on neurodiversity in Australia and beyond.

## **How we will measure progress:**

- new funding obtained to further inclusive HE education research
- results of current project evaluating the efficacy of the Inclusive Teaching Toolkit
- number of attendees at Inclusive Education Showcase and outreach presentations
- number of outputs (publications or less conventional formats) in the area of inclusive teaching and learning
- number of new partnerships with groups similar to Diversified.



# Knowledge Exchange and Engagement

## DIIU Associates Programme

The key function of the DIIU is to sustain a network of UNSW people with an interest in disability research or education, or general disability inclusion within the UNSW community. At the core of the network are the Institute Associates, who currently number 39 across 6 Faculties and Divisions.

The Associates keep the Institute in touch with work that engages with disability across the university. They amplify the efficacy and impact of the Institute, networking and coordinating with others with similar interests, maintaining a pool of inclusive research expertise.

The DIIU in turn provides mentoring and guidance, and profiles the Associates' research and achievements through the DIIU website, newsletter and social media.

**Our strategic goal: Our Associates form a community of around 50, that meets regularly through the year, builds new collaborations, provides input to the Newsletter, webinars and podcasts, and acts as a pool of ambassadors for the DIIU.**

## How we will do this:

- continue to hold regular Associates' events and publicise them widely
- promote the Associates network at university events
- encourage Associates to hold their own events, benefiting from co-badging, organisational or financial support from the DIIU.

## How we will measure progress:

- number of Associates
- level of regular engagement of Associates with the Institute.



# Internal Engagement

The DIIU's internal engagement within the University is extensive although often low-profile, ranging from specialist teaching to providing expert input on issues from policy to working practices, building signage to curriculum development.

The University's Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) is a visible demonstration of UNSW's commitment to transformative societal impact, ensuring that people with disability are equal members of the UNSW community as a matter of equity and justice. The DIIU Director is also the Executive Sponsor of the DIAP. The leadership of the DIIU provides an integrated and robust basis for the DIAP across the whole university.



**Our strategic goal: the DIIU is recognised as the go-to source of knowledge for disability inclusion at UNSW, including the current and future versions of the DIAP.**

## **How we will do this:**

- expand general awareness of the DIIU by raising our profile among UNSW people at higher levels
- strategically target the most effective pathways to influence.

## **How we will measure progress:**

- evaluation of the current DIAP and implementation of its successor
- involvement of the DIIU in significant decision making, including presence on key committees
- 'brand recognition' of the DIIU within the University.





# External Impact

We want our research not just to generate new knowledge, but to have a positive societal impact on the lives of people with disability. To do this we engage with external actors and agencies in a variety of ways, aiming both to influence and to learn.

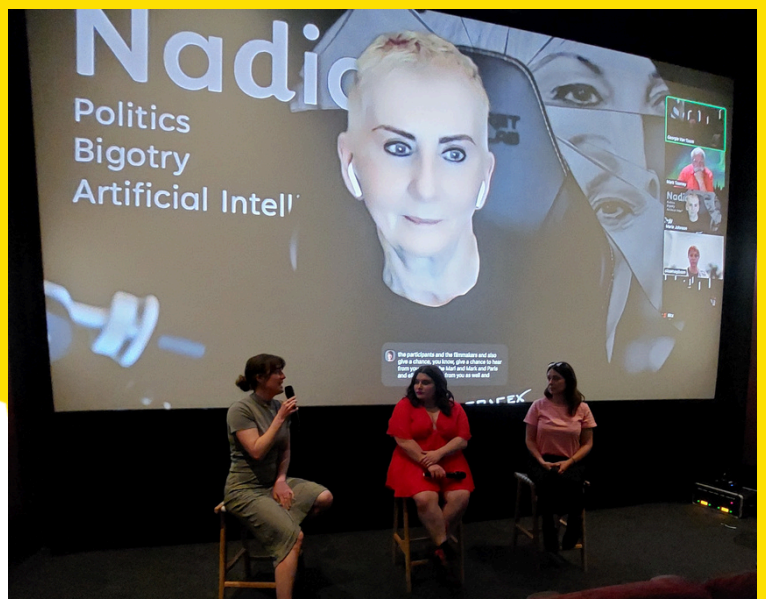
- Our links to disabled people's organisations and disability representative organisations are a conduit straight to discussions at the heart of the disability community
- Through the Director and Academic Leads, we connect to State and Commonwealth agencies that include NSW Health, the Australian Health Ethics Committee, the Council for Intellectual Disability, the National Disability Research Partnership
- We collaborate with UN agencies and other humanitarian bodies, particularly in the Asia Pacific, for training and information exchange
- We make regular submissions to policy consultations organised by government or other agencies
- The DIU provides public commentary on disability issues to inform, challenge, and change opinion.



**Our strategic goal: The DIU is recognised externally as a thought leader in disability in general, and disability inclusion in particular.**

How we will do this:

- develop a framework to structure our external communications and submissions over the course of the year



- foster more active relationships with current contacts
- monitor opportunities to engage with audiences beyond 'the usual suspects', for example in science and in creative arts
- **we will need additional financial resources to support our Project Officer to do this**
- led by **Professor Alastair McEwin**, develop and implement a strategy to translate the Disability Royal Commission's recommendations into practice, to drive systemic change and long-term societal impact.

#### How we will measure progress:

- number of submissions to government or other consultations every year
- number of public events
- counts of media presence
- invited presence on boards, committees, conferences, and panels, including non-academic bodies.





# Our Strategic Plan in Summary

- Secure our research and translation capacity through a strategic portfolio of inclusive research projects, training and fostering emerging researchers.
- Transform the learning experience at UNSW by ensuring all education and training programs are disability-inclusive and accessible as standard practice.
- Strengthen external engagement through existing and new partnerships with disabled people's organizations, disability representative organizations, and relevant policy bodies.
- Increase our visibility and national influence through our publications, innovative public engagement, and media presence.







## Contact Us

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