

# Access and Inclusion Plan 2020-2024

Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion



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## Acknowledgment of Country

UTS acknowledges the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, the Boorooberongal people of the Dharug Nation, the Bidiagal people and the Gamaygal people upon whose ancestral lands our university stands. We would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present, acknowledging them as the traditional custodians of knowledge for these lands.

# Foreword from the Vice-Chancellor

Our vision at UTS is to be a leading public university of technology, recognised for our global impact.

Achieving this is inextricably tied to providing an open, inclusive, and supportive environment for every member of our community. Our systems must support students, staff and members of wider communities to fulfil their potential and offer their full contribution to society.

UTS first initiated disability action planning in 1997. Over the past two decades, UTS has continued to work to support people with disability. Now, well into the 21st century, we exist in an increasingly digital world. It is imperative that our accessible environments extend to virtual spaces, and we continue to enhance our digital service delivery with accessibility in mind.

I acknowledge that the institutional setting in which this work takes place is not just about infrastructure. It is about building knowledge and capabilities within our human capital, nurturing the kind of community we aspire to be and continuing to educate ourselves and others about the importance of accessibility for all people.

This plan outlines our commitment to be a university in which individuals with disability can actively participate and excel. It is my sincere hope that the plan, which reflects the voices of those with lived experience of disability, will strengthen our university-wide commitment and enhance our ability to deliver it.

UTS is proud to present this plan and I commend it for implementation by everyone in the UTS community.

We are, and always will be, an inclusive university.

Professor Attila Brungs  
Vice-Chancellor and President  
University of Technology Sydney

## Development of the plan

The Access and Inclusion Plan 2020-2024 is UTS's fifth Disability Action Plan. It builds on past progress to enhance our provision of inclusive education and employment opportunities, in world class campus and digital facilities that are accessible for people of all abilities.

The plan reflects the value we place on the perspectives of people with disability. It was developed through active consultation with UTS staff and students, focusing on those with lived experience of disability.

It also reflects significant relationships with industry and community partners. Development of the plan was further supported by UTS's active memberships of the [Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training](#), [Australian Network on Disability](#), and [Diversity Council Australia](#).

UTS aims to be a leading practice tertiary education provider and employer for people with disability. This means moving beyond compliance, to model disability inclusion. UTS affirms our commitment to eliminate, as far as possible, direct and indirect disability discrimination, and remove barriers to full participation in education and employment by providing reasonable adjustments. Further, we aim to lead the way in innovative inclusive practice across all our work and to embed universal design into our everyday practices, based on the lived experiences of people with disability.

# A snapshot of disability in Australia

**4.4 million**

Australians living with a disability in 2018.

**17.7%**

of the total Australian population

Disability is a normal part of the human experience

Defined in accordance with the definition in the Commonwealth Disability Discrimination Act (1992) (DDA), disability is any condition that impairs the intellectual, learning, neurological, physical, psychiatric and/or sensory functioning of a person. It may be permanent, temporary, total, partial, lifelong, acquired, visible or invisible.

Higher education institutions across Australia have experienced significant growth in the number of students with disability. Between 2013 and 2018, the enrolment of undergraduate students with disability grew by 50 per cent compared to 12.6 per cent growth in undergraduate enrolments nationally.<sup>i</sup>

## UTS students

In 2019, UTS had close to 1,900 students with disability registered with the UTS Accessibility Service. This has increased significantly over the past decade, reflecting national trends in the participation of tertiary students with disability.

## UTS staff

In 2019 2.7 per cent of permanent and fixed-term contract employees<sup>1</sup> at UTS identified as living with a disability, and 1.2 per cent required a workplace adjustment.

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<sup>1</sup> This figure excludes casual staff members and honorary appointments.

## Jatin Dhanji

Jatin Dhanji is in his third year of a combined Bachelor of Business Bachelor of Laws.

Born with cone dystrophy, he experiences low vision and relies on access assistance to undertake his studies.

Access assistance provided by UTS includes: providing an exam room with UTS computers equipped with zoomtext software, which enlarges text on examination materials; the UTS online platform, uploaded with lecture and tutorial materials; an accessibility consultant from the UTS Accessibility Service to address any access issues arising; and speech function available on zoomtext to read aloud text of materials.

When Jatin first commenced study at UTS, Guide Dogs Australia provided him with orientation training around campus to establish familiarity with lecture and tutorial rooms. This enabled Jatin's independence in mobility around campus, and since 2019 he has been a Guide Dogs NSW Ambassador.

Jatin is also an Access Ambassador at UTS, helping to increase awareness of accessibility. He has undertaken peer networking, become a UTS Student Ambassador, and is the Events and Marketing Lead at the UTS Music Society,

On what makes him feel included, Jatin says:

*Inclusion is when your access needs are met, but it's done in a way that doesn't make you feel as though it's a hassle for other people ... [it] makes you feel as though you are not putting a burden on other people just to help you.*

*As for the social aspect, inclusion is where people aren't defining you by your impairment. So people aren't looking at me and being like "oh, that's the guy who's legally blind", rather than that, being like "oh, that's Jatin", relating to the person before access needs.*

# Legislative framework

UTS is committed to meeting our responsibilities under the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* and the *Commonwealth Disability Standards for Education 2005*, requiring reasonable adjustments for students with disability to allow them to access and participate in education on the same basis as their peers. In addition, the TEQSA Higher Education Standards Framework (2015) requires higher education providers to plan to meet the learning and support needs of all students, so that, as far as possible, all have equal opportunities for academic success.

This plan is designed not only to meet our legal obligations under State and Commonwealth legislation, policy frameworks and UTS internal policies, but to also foster an inclusive, ethical and respectful university in which all members of our community are valued. Key legislation and policies include:

- [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#) (Cwlth)
- [Disability Standards for Education 2005](#) (Cwlth)
- [Disability \(Access to Premises – Buildings\) Standards 2010](#)
- [Fair Work Act 2009](#) (Cwlth)
- [Higher Education Standards Framework \(Threshold Standards\) 2015](#) and [Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency Guidance Note on Diversity and Equity](#)
- [Australian Government National Disability Strategy 2010-2020](#)
- [Anti-Discrimination Act 1997](#) (NSW)
- [NSW work health and safety legislation](#)
- [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2006](#) (ratified by Australia in 2008)
- [Marrakesh Treaty to Facilitate Access to Published Works for Persons Who Are Blind, Visually Impaired or Otherwise Print Disabled 2013](#) (signed by Australia in 2014).
- Universities Australia (formerly Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee – AVCC) [Guidelines Relating to Students with Disabilities](#) (May 2006) and [Guidelines on Information Access for Students with Print Disabilities](#) (November 2004)
- [UTS Accessible Environments Policy](#)
- [UTS Equity, Inclusion and Respect Policy](#)
- [UTS Workplace Adjustment Procedures for Staff Members with Disability](#)

# The 2015-19 Access and Inclusion Plan

The UTS Access and Inclusion Plan 2015-19 focussed on four key areas:

**Learning** – supporting inclusive education and students with disability

**Access** – accessible built and digital environments

**Employment** – accessible recruitment and career development

**Culture** – increasing awareness, challenging stereotypes and stigma

## Key achievements

- Becoming the first Australian university to sign SANE Australia's Mindful Employer Charter in 2016 to help highlight our commitment to providing a mentally healthy workplace.
- A UTS Staff Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy, including developing training and resources to support mental health at work.
- Appointing two new Accessibility Specialist roles in the Information Technology Division in 2019.
- Establishing a student advisory committee of Access Ambassadors.
- A new partnership between UTS and disability services provider *Onemda* to co-design the products and services for people with disability.
- Partnering with JobAccess to host two major seminars involving businesses, academics and community members with disability.
- Launching a *UTS Accessibility Resource Guide* to provide information on accessible built, digital and learning environments, events and employment practices.
- Introducing audio description sessions for all UTS Art exhibitions.
- Delivering mental health first aid and awareness training for more than 500 staff and students.
- Celebrating the achievements of people with disability on International Day of People with Disability through:

- An exhibition *Access Leads to Inclusion: Disability at UTS* displaying the lived experiences of UTS students and staff with disability.
- Inclusive sports days with wheelchair basketball, quidditch and netball.
- Upgrading UTS Library's assistive technologies rooms with multimedia computers, adjustable desks, monitors, new software and scanning technologies, and introducing online library tutorials for those who need alternative learning supports.

## Shirley Alexander

Professor Shirley Alexander is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President (Education and Students) at UTS. She looks after the quality of students' education experiences at UTS.

Alexander has single-sided deafness, meaning she has 'almost no hearing' in her right ear and experiences loud tinnitus continuously.

Alexander wears a hearing aid and is 'fairly good at lip-reading', which most are unaware of. She finds she has no problems communicating in a quiet space, facing the person speaking. Yet, background noise can overwhelm her ability to hear and understand what is being said.

She has two main tips when speaking with people: 'speak clearly', and 'don't put your hand over your mouth when speaking'.

Alexander uses other aids for assistance, including: hearing loops, live captioning, and typed notes for agendas and minutes of meetings. Typed notes and structured communications help her mentally prepare for meetings, then review what was said.

For Alexander, feeling included is simple – she just needs to hear what people are saying.

# 2020-24 Access and Inclusion Plan – Our vision

In the 2020-2024 Access and Inclusion Plan, UTS intends to extend our progress to date through implementing key actions across five focus areas:

**Learning and education**

**Employment**

**Accessible environments**

**Culture**

**Research and innovation**

This vision is supported by a detailed action plan, outlining timeframes and responsibilities, which aligns with the strategic objectives of the UTS 2027 Strategy and annual Corporate Plans.

## **Learning and education**

UTS will ensure that our enrolment and student administrative systems, teaching practices, learning materials, digital learning platforms, assessment procedures, and research environments are accessible and inclusive for prospective and current students with disability.

### **To do this we will:**

- Ensure that the UTS digital learning environment is accessible by complying with at least the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0.
- Require all teaching staff to demonstrate an understanding of Inclusive Education Principles and how to deliver and support inclusive education.
- Provide technical support and guidance for faculties and teaching staff to enhance the delivery of accessibility in the classroom, during assessment, and in the professional experience environment.
- Ensure student access to all new systems and websites at UTS by working with relevant UTS staff, vendors and service providers to incorporate universal design and comply with universal accessibility standards WCAG 2.0 A, and where possible, WCAG 2.0 AA consistent

with UTS Web publishing policy and the *Disability Standards for Education* (2005).

- Streamline communication to increase time for quality casework and improve seamless collaboration between accessibility support services and faculties.
- Integrate awareness of accessibility and support for postgraduate research students with disability into researcher development and doctoral supervision development program.
- Improve our IT systems to ensure earlier provision of accessible course material for students with disabilities.
- Work to constantly improve the student experience for students registered with UTS Accessibility Service for temporary or ongoing disability.
- Work to provide opportunities for students to experience authentic disability related learning, and undertaking work integrated learning projects with community based disability organisations through the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion's Shopfront program and SOUL co-curricular community leadership and volunteering program.

## Employment

UTS recognises the benefits of a diverse workforce that is reflective of the wider community and will ensure that our business operations and strategies reflect a long-term, sustainable, independent commitment to social impact, including by actively addressing barriers to employment and professional development for current and future staff with disability.

### To do this we will:

- Ensure the needs of students with disability are considered as part of UTS employability initiatives for students.
- Work to match the NDIS initiative of improving the employment rates of people with disability at UTS by 6 per cent over the life of the Plan.
- Ensure all UTS hiring managers undertake training about unconscious bias in recruitment.

- Embed a culture that supports workplace flexibility across UTS and makes flexible working an option for all staff.
- Ensure all UTS supervisors/managers undertake Disability Confident Manager training.
- Review our processes and procedures for implementing workplace adjustments to ensure best practice.
- Share and learn from research on international best practice in improving employment outcomes for people with disability.

## **Accessible environments**

UTS will provide accessible services, facilities, amenities and grounds, ensuring an optimal inclusive experience for students, staff and visitors to UTS.

### **To do this we will:**

- Ensure that our policies and practices support built and digital environments which are accessible to students, staff and visitors with disability.
- Aim for all new digital platforms to represent leading practice in international ICT accessibility and ensure regular testing of existing digital platforms to maintain a minimum compliance with relevant WCAG 2.0.
- Provide easy to find avenues for staff, students and community members with disability to understand how we support accessibility at UTS.
- Provide mechanisms for on-going consultation and easily accessed ways of providing feedback about accessibility issues at UTS.
- Review our processes to ensure best practice in our approaches to workplace health and safety for UTS staff with disability.
- Review Student Housing to ensure optimal accessibility and inclusion for student residents with disability.
- Work to improve availability of accessible parking and amenities for staff and students with assistance animals.

## Culture

UTS will embed a culture of inclusivity that recognises and embraces the value and input that people with disability bring to UTS.

### To do this we will:

- Ensure our marketing, communications and events reflect the diversity of the UTS community through affirmatively promoting disability through appropriate language and imagery.
- Lead the higher education sector in providing opportunities for people with disability to participate in the cultural life of UTS including art and sport by developing community partnerships and through a continuing program of accessible and inclusive events.
- Develop, promote and celebrate the leadership of people with disability at UTS.
- Increase opportunities for UTS staff to support community based disability organisations through the rollout of our Social Justice Leave initiative and brokered volunteering pilot.

## Research and innovation

UTS will provide research leadership by working with industry and community partners to co-create a more accessible and inclusive world for people with disability.

### To do this we will:

- Develop a UTS Disability Research Capability statement that details UTS's distinctive capabilities in innovative industry and community engaged research.
- Hold a symposium in which key stakeholders including community organisations, researchers and industry come together to explore evolving context, drivers and trends and co-design a Disability Research Strategy.
- Develop a career development strategy to strengthen support for researchers with disability at UTS.

- Increase regular engagement with disability focussed community partners to identify opportunities for innovative research partnerships.
- Increase our disability research impact and engagement with public debate on disability and inclusion through seeking opportunities for policy advocacy.
- Explore opportunities for innovative and collaborative disability research and practice with an intersectional focus, in particular building on research in the Indigenous and disability spaces.

## Simon Darcy

Simon Darcy is a Professor at the UTS Business School. He specialises in developing inclusive organisational approaches for diversity groups and understanding the social impact of organisations and individuals. Simon's research has spanned sport, tourism, events, volunteers, transport, the built environment and disability services. His research and industry collaboration on accessible tourism has been recognised for its outstanding contribution to the field.

Simon has a long history of involvement in disability advocacy and volunteer boards, together with representation on government steering committees to improve the social participation of people with disability. From 2011-15 he was a member of the Disability Council of NSW and was actively involved in shaping the development of the NSW Disability Inclusion Act, 2014, changes to accessible public transport provision and disability employment initiatives.

He uses his professional skills as an environmental planner and access auditor to assist industry associations and was the past Vice President of the Association of Consultants in Access Australia. He is currently working on a project relating to the National Disability Insurance Scheme, National Disability Strategy, disability entrepreneurship and person centred approaches to service provision.

Simon's work has been recognised for its excellence through the awarding of grants with the Australian Research Council, Sustainable Tourism Cooperative Research Centre and the United Nations. His current Australian Research Council Linkage Grant (2016-19) is examining disability entrepreneurship with the industry partners of National Disability Services, Settlement Services Australia and BreakThru People Solutions.

As both an academic and a person with a high level disability, Simon brings a unique insider's perspective to understanding disability issues and the rights of all people to fully participate in community life.

## Communicating the plan

The plan will be communicated widely across UTS through staff and student channels. It will be made available online on the UTS website, and will be provided to the Australian Human Rights Commission for online publication.

## Implementation

All UTS staff, including senior executives, managers, and supervisors, are responsible for implementing the actions in this plan.

Where it is identified that staff need to undertake training or adapt their skill set, both academic and professional staff as specified, will be required to undertake such activities as part of their paid duties.

## Governance

The Vice-Chancellor's Social Justice and Inclusion Committee (VCSJIC) has overall responsibility for monitoring and evaluating this plan. The VCSJIC will play a governance role in coordinating the plan across UTS and ensuring it is aligned with the UTS 2027 Strategy.

It is intended that the responsibilities identified in the action plan that supports this plan will inform the operational strategies of the relevant areas including Divisions, Faculties and Units.

These areas will be required to report formally to the VCSJIC on progress at each committee meeting including tracking the progress of activities, detailing key achievements in the last quarter, and risks to progress, in the same format as the priority actions identified under the UTS 2027 Strategy.

The success of this plan will also be measured by reporting the experiences of UTS staff and students with a disability. The metrics for this will include staff and student surveys, focus group feedback and data related to:

- Engagement and satisfaction.
- Recruitment, promotion and attrition.

UTS welcomes feedback on this Access and Inclusion Plan, which can be provided to the Centre for Social Justice and Inclusion at:

Telephone: +61 2 9514 1084

Email: [equity@uts.edu.au](mailto:equity@uts.edu.au)

Website: [socialjustice.uts.edu.au](http://socialjustice.uts.edu.au)

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<sup>i</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017, *Disability in Australia: changes over time in inclusion and participation in education*, Cat. No. DIS 69. Canberra: AIHW.

Koshy, P 2019, *Equity Student Participation in Australian Higher Education: 2013 to 2018*. National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education (NCSEHE), Perth: Curtin University.