

# The Universitas 21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Report

Partnering globally to champion change

**Part One: Disability governance norms**

June 2025

*Image illustrates the global collaboration of U21 and this project - the image on the title page is a map of the world with orange circle symbols of each member university appearing on the city where they are based.*





Fudan University



Korea University



KU Leuven



Lund University



McMaster University



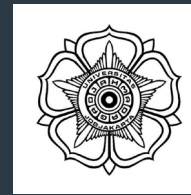
National University of Singapore



Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile



Shanghai Jiao Tong University



Universitas Gadjah Mada



Tecnológico de Monterrey



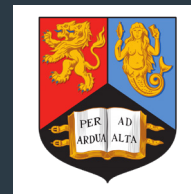
UC Davis



University of Amsterdam



The University of Auckland



University of Birmingham



University College Dublin



University of Connecticut



University of Delhi



The University of Edinburgh



University of Glasgow



The University of Hong Kong



University of Johannesburg



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University of Zurich



UNSW Sydney



Waseda University

# Background

Throughout 2023 and 2024, the Universitas 21 Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group undertook the development of a Network-wide framework to guide EDI efforts across member institutions.

As part of this process, the U21 Disability Community of Practice (COP) was consulted during the drafting of the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement. Recognising the value of this Framework, the Disability COP sought to support and enhance the leadership of U21 universities in advancing EDI, particularly in the area of disability inclusion.

Building on this momentum, the Disability COP proposed the U21 Disability Policy Mapping Initiative. This initiative invited university leadership to submit all relevant public documents pertaining to the inclusion of persons with disabilities. Each institution was also asked to nominate a contact person to facilitate the provision of these policies and to participate actively in the Disability COP.

Professor Paul Harpur OAM, as co-lead of the Disability COP and with established funding and strong backing from U21, offered to lead a Comparative Interpretive Policy Analysis (CIPA) of the collected documents. This analysis aimed to identify common commitments and best practices across the network, culminating in recommendations for a U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Report.

In April 2024, the U21 Senior Leaders' Group formally adopted the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement and endorsed the U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Initiative. Throughout 2024, the Disability COP received substantial support from the U21 secretariat in finalising and distributing a survey to all thirty universities within the network. The survey was completed, and relevant documents were collected. Additional data collection and analysis were required following the inclusion of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign in the U21 Network. A dedicated team of staff and students from across the U21 Network contributed to data collection, analysis, and the drafting of this report, with a full list of contributors included in the attached document.

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The above table of contents lists the parts and chapters of the report. Each chapter is authored by staff from across the U21 Network, who may use variations of inclusive language as best matches their experience.

# Introduction to the U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Report

**Professor Paul Harpur OAM**

## Introduction

In this introductory chapter I want to share my personal vision, as well as the vision of many colleagues involved in this journey of change.

I believe universities are a force for good in society. University education opens opportunities to individuals and provides our nations with the workforces they need for economic growth. Universities employ thought leaders who produce research and innovation which grows economies, enhances policy responses, and leads to transformational scientific discoveries.

Discoveries which have strengthened food security, the environment, health, modelling and other benefits to society. Highly visible benefits of such research include the development of vaccines, such as for COVID-19 and the HPV viruses, GPS technology, and web browsers.

The universities who feature in this report, the 30 member universities of the Universitas 21 (U21) Network, individually and collectively are enriching, empowering, and enabling the communities they serve. Those communities are stretched over 20 countries, collectively including 1.3 million students, over 220,000 staff, have approaching 2.5 million alumni, and stretch their positive impact into towns, cities and across the globe.

Those of us privileged to work in a U21 Network university, work in an institution that is committed to positive change. For many of us who want to have a positive impact upon the world, when we advance our personal visions, we find we are aligned to the vision of our university. The energy of those involved, along with the support for this report, has already led to impact and to the successful completion of this report.

## Structure of this report

In addition to this introductory part, this report has 5 parts. The parts of this report groups chapters according to most universities' organisational structures. Accordingly, Part 1 addresses university-wide governance on disability inclusion and Part 2 groups chapters concerning key priority of research-intensive universities: research. These chapters introduce new norms pertaining to disability inclusive research and analyse how U21 Network universities are responding. The Report then turns to policies supporting students with disabilities. This part includes chapters where universities are responding to the profound shifts in norms and laws pertaining to disability inclusion. In an often-overlooked area, Part 4 addresses how universities can and should be supporting their staff with disabilities. Finally in Part 5, this report includes chapters on digital, physical, and library services that are used by students, staff, and the wider community. In addition to mapping out policies, each chapter makes recommendations to enhance the impact of this report.



**Although reports generally do not have impact until they are published, the process of producing *this* report has already led to positive impact.**

## Impact

Impactful change occurs when top down and bottom-up inclusion initiatives intersect. This is the reality on disability inclusion in the U21 Network.

The reality is that many of our universities are leading on inclusion, but many others operate in regulatory ecosystems where inclusion is less supported. The U21 Senior Leaders' Group has recognised and responded to the challenges by adopting in April 2024 the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement.

In addition to adopting the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement in April 2024, the U21 Senior Leaders' Group agreed to support the U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Initiative. When considering whether they should support this initiative, the U21 Senior Leaders' Group would have been aware that strategic, policy, and practical efforts on disability inclusion in higher education can be mixed. Despite the risk of adverse findings, the U21 Senior Leaders' Group decided to support this initiative and send a message that there is high-level commitment to identifying ways of doing better on disability inclusion.

By supporting the gathering of data from 30 member universities, the U21 Senior Leaders' Group have both sent a message across our communities that disability inclusion matters, plus provided tangible support to the gathering of data which has enabled this overview of current disability inclusion policies to be produced.

This top-down support was heard by people working in U21 Network member universities and has contributed to bottom-up efforts to respond to this opportunity and build lasting collaborations. Therefore, this report acknowledges the PhD staff members who contributed to authoring a thematic chapter.

The thematic groups that have come together have recognised the value in collaborating and thematic sub-groups of the U21 Disability Community of Practice have been proposed.

Already this report is contributing to lasting change.

Lasting change in the policy delivery space has been created by providing examples of workable solutions that exist in U21 Network universities. The U21 Network provides an avenue where universities with identified best practices, can share their experiences directly with other member universities, and thus build stronger responses to inclusion across the U21 Network.

With respect to informing responses, the professional and academic staff involved in this analysis have drawn upon their expertise when analysing the data to help generate a large list of recommendations. The recommendations called for by the authors in this report would profoundly shift the teaching, staffing, service delivery, and research ecosystems in our institutions. Transformation of this magnitude does not occur in the short term; however, reports of this nature occur infrequently, thus some recommendations might be adopted in the short-term, whereas others will take more time.

Often recommendations are grouped by what is possible in the short, medium, and long term. The different situations of universities across the U21 Network, caused by differences in cultures and regulatory environments across over 20 countries and by universities themselves, means that segmenting recommendations by implementation timeframes is not viable. Instead, recommendations are grouped by the domains in the report so that those reviewing their position can more easily identify the recommendations most relevant to their needs.

## Conclusion

To support the U21 Network and its university members to become disability champions of change, this report underscores the transformative potential of universities in fostering disability inclusion. By leveraging the collective strength of the U21 Network, we can drive significant advancements in creating inclusive educational, work and research and innovation eco-systems. This report not only highlights the current state of disability inclusion policies but also provides actionable recommendations to enhance these efforts.

The commitment from both top-down leadership and grassroots initiatives within our universities is crucial for sustained progress. As we continue to share best practices and collaborate across institutions, we can make meaningful strides towards a more inclusive society.

The work presented here is a testament to the power of commitment by those working in U21 Network universities and the U21 secretariat action and the dedication to improving how our universities operate and the lives of persons with disabilities. On disability, our universities train students with and without disabilities, employ staff with and without disabilities and produce research and innovation which can create a more inclusive world.

U21 is a place where we can come together to share, learn, and enhance our collective responses. Those responses will impact upon our universities, our U21 Network, to over 20 countries where our universities are situated and more broadly across the globe.

**// Changing the world for the better starts with a single step. I believe this report is such a step.**

Professor Paul Harpur OAM

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# Executive summary

**Between 15% and 20% of the world has a disability and in many of our universities more than 10% of our communities live with a disability.**

Universities train the disability leaders of tomorrow, employ the disability leaders of today, and produces research and innovation that leads to a better and more inclusive world. Drawing upon existing policies and practices from Universitas 21 (U21) Network member universities, this report provides a pathway for our universities, separately and collectively through the U21 Network, to more effectively and efficiently realise our missions, and through this, do better at what we do best: **Create and share knowledge for the betterment of all.**

This report was made possible following the adoption of the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement and the support from the U21 Senior Leaders' Group to support this initiative. With over 100 U21 staff volunteering, this report involved 30 member universities across over 20 countries, resulting in a comprehensive analysis of disability inclusion within the U21 Network. This report, led by Professor Paul Harpur, aims to support U21 universities in advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the disability space.

This report contains 5 main parts, each focusing on a different aspect of disability inclusion in the university setting. While these standalone parts like this one are available for convenience, readers seeking further context and detailed recommendations should refer to the complete report. A consolidated list of recommendations is provided after the Executive Summary.

## Part 1: Disability Governance Norms

This part explores the establishment of new norms on disability governance within the U21 Network. It emphasises the importance of fostering equitable partnerships among member universities and ensuring disability representation in governance structures. The report highlights the need for clear leadership roles, strategic integration, continuous improvement, and adequate funding to support disability inclusion initiatives. Additionally, it addresses the intersectionality of disability with other marginalised identities, such as Indigenous, LGBTQIA+, and age-conscious frameworks.

## Part 2: Disability Inclusion and the Research and Innovation Ecosystem

Part 2 examines how U21 universities can align their research and innovation practices with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). It underscores the importance of integrating CRPD norms into ethics and grant review processes, enhancing data collection, and implementing co-design methodologies. It also discusses the role of university research groups in championing disability inclusion and the need for comprehensive disability inclusion research and innovation, drawing from the best model at plans of inclusive practices. It calls for increased representation of people with disabilities in research leadership roles and the establishment of formal benchmarks within institutional disability policies. For the sake of this report, the CRPD describes disability in Article 1 to **“include those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments which in interaction with various barriers may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.”**

## Part 3: Creating an Inclusive Community for Students with Disabilities

This part focuses on the transition from reasonable accommodations to universal design and universal design for learning (UDL). It advocates for a proactive approach to designing inclusive educational environments that anticipate and remove barriers to learning. The report highlights the importance of enhanced outreach programs, pre-orientation and orientation programs, and accessible housing options for students with disabilities. Additionally, it addresses the need for clear access to disability support information for international and exchange students and the importance of tailored career counselling and work-integrated learning opportunities to support students with disabilities in their transition to employment.

## Part 4: Universities Support for Staff with Disabilities

Examining the measures adopted by U21 universities to create disability-inclusive workplaces, this part discusses proactive measures to promote the recruitment and retention of staff with disabilities, the implementation of universal design, and the streamlining of reasonable accommodation processes. Part 4 also addresses the challenges faced by staff with disabilities who travel for work and recommends central funding for disability-related travel expenses, mechanisms for non-disclosure, and internal booking systems with accessibility information. Furthermore, it highlights the importance of awareness-raising activities, including mandatory training, inclusive events, and the development of comprehensive resources to support ongoing education and awareness efforts.

## Part 5: University Services and Disability Inclusion

Part 5 explores the role of university services, including libraries and digital and physical spaces, in promoting disability inclusion. It emphasises the importance of integrating accessibility into all library policies and strategic planning, developing physical spaces and assistive technology, and providing ongoing training for library staff. The report also discusses the need for capacity building across university staff to ensure understanding and implementation of digital accessibility standards. It advocates for the development of digital inclusion roadmaps, publicising compliance and monitoring metrics, and partnering with other universities and software vendors to enhance digital accessibility. Additionally, it addresses the importance of establishing design guides and capital works plans for the built environment and creating dedicated positions, such as Campus Accessibility Officers, to oversee accessibility and inclusion initiatives.

# Part 1: Report recommendations

The following consolidated list of recommendations is drawn from and referenced in the chapters of this report.

## Part 1: Disability governance norms

### Chapter 1.1. New norms on disability governance

Universities should ensure that their policy responses to disability inclusion reflect disability human rights norms set out in the CRPD.

### Chapter 1.2. Disability inclusion and the Universitas 21 Network

- a) **Foster equitable partnerships:** the U21 Network should continue to foster equitable partnerships among its member universities, recognising historical and contemporary power dynamics. Participatory knowledge sharing should be encouraged to support collective engagement and mutual learning.
- b) **Ensuring disability representation:** U21 EDI Committee to integrate disability inclusion throughout the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement. This should be achieved by first realising disability inclusion in Principle 3 on leadership. Specifically, by ensuring disability representation from across the network in governance and stakeholder groups that encourage diverse insights.
- c) **Develop a disability inclusion action plan:** Similar to the approach adopted by Universities Australia on advancing Indigenous inclusion, the U21 disability leaders should be encouraged to explore how an U21 disability inclusion action plan could be developed and advanced, so that disability inclusion across the U21 Network can be advanced consistently and sustainably.

### Chapter 1.3. University-wide disability governance

- a) **Establish clear leadership roles on disability governance:** Universities should create clear disability governance leadership structures. This should include leadership on diversity generally, through a dedicated Deputy Vice-Chancellor (DVC) or Pro-Vice Chancellor (PVC) role that is supported by authority and resources. Additionally, universities should appoint a senior executive specifically targeting disability inclusion across the university. Universities should strive to appoint individuals with lived experience of disability to lead disability governance and to be employed within the team to operationalise the university's disability inclusion strategy. This role could include activities across all areas of the university operation. This role should have clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and well-defined responsibilities to ensure accountability and progress.
- b) **Strategic integration and support:** Inclusion should be prioritised in the strategic agenda and specifically included in plans to operationalise the university's strategic plan, such as through disability action plans. This ensures that disability inclusion responsibilities are distributed across the institution, not just placed on one individual or unit. The distribution of responsibility will require KPIs placed on those who have disability inclusion responsibility across the university. These KPIs should form part of existing reporting and performance appraisal processes to maximise accountability and compliance.

- c) **Funding and staffing disability inclusion governance:** Universities must provide adequate funding and staffing to enable disability diversity initiatives to be implemented. This includes central funding for accessibility improvements and resources for compliance activities, program development, and network building. Ideally this includes the establishment of a support framework and unit within the university to assist the EDI lead in fulfilling their mission. This ensures that the diversity inclusion lead is not overwhelmed and can effectively drive change.
- d) **Collecting data on staff with disability and continuous improvement on disability governance:** the university should continuously seek feedback from the university community, including collecting data on staff with disabilities and the barriers they experience, and adapt disability strategies and practices accordingly. This ensures that initiatives remain relevant and effective in addressing the needs of diverse groups.

#### Chapter 1.4. Universities enabling and empowering

- a) **Visibility of disability leadership:** It is important for groups that represent disability interests to clearly state whether they are disability-led in their outward-facing communications, such as on their websites and promotional materials.
- b) **Develop disability led groups:** Further attention should also be given to encouraging the establishment of new disability-led groups within universities that currently lack them.
- c) **Knowledge sharing:** To support the formation of new groups, universities could facilitate knowledge-sharing opportunities between institutions with well-established disability networks and those seeking to develop their own.

#### Chapter 1.5. Disability and Intersectionality

- a) **Leverage existing diversity programs:** Leverage existing diversity programs (e.g. Athena SWAN, Age-Friendly Universities) to establish structured, intersectional frameworks that ensure coordinated responses across marginalised groups. Members can consider if joining is right for their needs.
- b) **Indigenous and First Nations perspectives:** Incorporate Indigenous and First Nations perspectives by engaging with Indigenous leaders, scholars, and disability advocates to develop culturally appropriate policies and services that use decolonisation strategies to reframe and reassess language, assumptions, ways of being, doing, and knowing.
- c) **LGBTIQ+:** Strengthen LGBTIQ+ inclusion within disability strategies by ensuring accessibility of queer spaces, recognising the unique challenges faced by disabled LGBTIQ+ individuals, and fostering collaborations between disability and queer student organisations and units.
- d) **Age conscious:** Apply an age-conscious framework to disability policies by considering how disability needs change across life stages and integrating insights from initiatives like the Age-Friendly University program.
- e) **Benchmarking:** Develop formal benchmarks for intersectionality within institutional disability policies, ensuring that intersectional perspectives are embedded in strategic plans, KPIs, and institutional commitments.



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## First Nations Acknowledgment

We recognise that due to the impacts of colonisation, Indigenous peoples are more likely to be living with disability and / or chronic illness compared to the wider population. This Review acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which the 30 U21 Network universities are situated, and pays respects to their Elders, past and present.

The status of traditional owners of lands differs across the footprints of the U21 Network's 30 universities, and the lead author Professor Paul Harpur OAM is based at The University of Queensland (UQ) and thus will provide an acknowledgement which is more reflective of the traditional lands on which he and many authors work.

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Owners and their custodianship of the lands on which UQ operates. We pay our respects to their Ancestors and their descendants, who continue cultural and spiritual connections to Country. We recognise their valuable contributions to Australian and global society.

The traditional owners acknowledged here include all those who are the traditional owners of the lands on which UQ operates. The UQ main campuses include 3 campuses in or around Brisbane city, being St Lucia, Dutton Park and Herston, as well as a campus at Gatton in the Lockyer Valley. The UQ geographical footprint includes off-campus sites with the Translational Research Institute, marine research stations at Heron and Stradbroke Islands, mineral research centre, seismograph station, veterinary and agricultural science teaching and research centres at Gatton, UQ Business School Brisbane City, social science research at Long Pocket, and teaching hospitals, health centres and other medical research facilities. The University's overseas establishments include UQ's North America office in Washington D.C., and the UQ-Ochsner Clinical School in Louisiana, United States of America.

Most students and staff are based in Brisbane city, which for tens of thousands of years was known by its traditional name, Meeanjin, which means "the place of the blue water lilies." Brisbane is the traditional home of the Turrbal and Yuggera peoples. UQ has geographic footprints on the lands of other traditional owners, and thus we also acknowledge:

- Bundaberg Rural Clinical School: Bailai, Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang and Taribelang Bunda peoples
- Gatton campus: Yuggera peoples
- Heron Island Research Station: Bailai, Gooreng Gooreng, Gurang and Taribelang Bunda peoples
- Hervey Bay: Butchulla people
- Meadowbrook - Yugambah Speaking Peoples
- Moreton Bay Research Station and Redland Hospital - Quandamooka people
- Rockhampton Rural Clinical School - Darumbal People
- Veterinary Practice Dayboro - Kabi Kabi people

# Method and approach

## Paul Harpur and Brooke Szucs

### Planning phase

This report has been made possible by the support of the U21 Secretariat and disability inclusion support within member universities. Efforts to build and strengthen collaboration on disability Inclusion was formalised in 2023 with the establishment of the U21 Disability Community of Practice.

When the U21 Senior Leaders' Group was developing the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement they consulted with the U21 Disability Community of Practice. As part of this process, Professor Harpur proposed to the U21 Disability Community of Practice that he led a policy mapping initiative to advance the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement. After consulting with the U21 Disability Community of Practice, as well as colleagues across the network, it was decided to seek support from the U21 Senior Leaders' Group in their April 2024 meeting in Hong Kong for a U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Initiative.

In their April 2024 meeting, the Senior Leaders' Group reiterated their commitment to advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion by adopting the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement and by agreeing to support the U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Initiative to be led by Professor Paul Harpur.

Following approval by the U21 Senior Leaders' Group, Professor Paul Harpur reached out to Mr Paul Sheeran to benefit from his project management expertise. Paul Sheeran formed

an Oversight Project Management Group which provided valuable support to this report's success. In particular, the Oversight Project Management Group assisted in the development of a project management plan to manage a project across 30 universities situated in over 20 countries, spread across all inhabited continents, with language barriers and multiple work groups at each university.

A draft of the project management plan was shared with the U21 Disability Community of Practice, as well as key groups within to gain feedback, including the Disability Collaboratory, the Disability Inclusion Group, and the Disability Inclusion and Advocacy Network. After implementing suggested changes, the project management plan was adopted.

The project management plan called for data to be collected via a survey and through a manual document collection process. To facilitate this, existing networks were used to gather U21 staff members to support in finalising the research tools, and to participate in the data gathering, analysis and writing of this report.

In addition to the Oversight Project Management Group, staff were sorted into teams aligned with the thematic chapters in this report. During the process some staff withdrew, and new staff joined the project. Those who made a substantive contribution to thematic chapters have been named as authors.

## Data collection

### The U21 Disability Policy Mapping survey

A literature review was performed by the project team to identify key themes. Drawing upon this, as well as decades of academic and professional experience, the research team co-designed the U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping survey. The survey was piloted tested at and several questions were added which addressed policy questions confronting those who delivered disability inclusion interventions.

The U21 Disability Policy Mapping survey aimed to gather information on disability inclusion policies and practices across the U21 Network of universities. The survey contained 30 questions covering various aspects of disability inclusion. Topics covered included:

1. **Governance:** Structure and evaluation of disability inclusion efforts.
2. **Strategies:** University-wide strategic plans and specific disability inclusion plans.
3. **Research:** Disability inclusion research groups and strategies.
4. **Courses:** Availability of disability studies programs.
5. **Training:** Disability awareness training for students and staff.
6. **Data Collection:** Collection of data on students and staff with disabilities.
7. **Accommodations:** Policies for making accommodations for students and staff.
8. **Support Services:** Support provided by libraries, IT services, and facilities.
9. **Innovative Initiatives:** Examples of innovative disability inclusion initiatives.
10. **Contacts:** Points of contact for sharing findings and participating in the U21 Disability Community of Practice.

The survey sort qualitative responses and relevant documents to inform shared insights and public resources aimed at enhancing disability inclusion across the U21 Network.

Ethical clearance for this project was obtained from UQ under reference number 2024/HE001229. After ethics approval was secured, an invitation to participate in the U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Initiative was shared across the U21 Network along with invitations to complete the survey being emailed by the U21 Secretariat to their contacts within member universities. In addition, the survey was distributed by members of the U21 Disability Community of Practice to colleagues they knew, at their university and others in the U21 Network, who would be well-equipped to respond.

### Manual searching

During the drafting of the survey tool, it was anticipated that the fragmented nature of disability inclusion policies across universities would result in incomplete responses. As anticipated, the fragmented nature of disability inclusion in universities made it challenging for staff members to provide full responses in all areas of the survey. Thusly, researchers from the thematic teams agreed to perform manual searches to ensure the data set was representative.

Often those working on the thematic chapters had engaged in policy searches of university websites for academic or professional purposes and thus were familiar with search protocols. Where this was not the case, the project lead was able to provide support.

In addition to relying upon staff assigned to thematic chapters, efforts were made to reduce challenges created by culture and language across the U21 Network. Professor Harpur used his ARC Future Fellowship funds to retain Ms Brooke Szucs, who speaks Japanese, German and Spanish, and Mr Nick Yao, who speaks all Chinese languages, to analyse documents and make direct contacts with U21 Network universities where these languages were the primary language of communication to elicit additional data.

## Data collected

A total of 22 universities submitted to the survey, contributing data that formed the foundation of the analysis. The data provided in the survey included qualitative responses along with documents that were uploaded to the survey and in other cases links to policy and websites. Where websites were provided, the documents were downloaded. This process elicited over 300 policy artifacts - policy documents and websites that explains processes.

The survey data was gathered and distributed to the teams working on thematic chapters. A preliminary analysis of the data was performed and gaps identified. To fill the gaps identified, manual data was collected from university websites, as well as requesting staff of target universities support in the provision of data.

## Data analysis

With the exceptions of chapters 1.2 and 2.1 which provide analysis of developing disability norms, and of chapter 1.5, on intersectionality, the approach to data analysis was the same in all other chapters. Even though the methods of chapters 1.2, 1.4 align with the method in this method chapter, the authors of those chapters desired to explain their methods in their chapters and thus those chapters include a method section.

The data was shared with the teams and support was provided to help narrow which

documents were most relevant to each thematic team.

To understand how different universities approached disability inclusion in each area, and to help identify innovative and best practices, each team engaged in a comparative policy analysis over the documents. This involved examining how different universities address accessibility and support based upon the qualitative data provided in the survey, as well as in the policies and websites gathered. Those involved in the analysis drew from their personal expertise working in the relevant policy area, as well as drawing upon scholarship and disability norms. Through this process, recommendations were developed for each chapter.

The involvement of multiple authors resulted in some variation of language, due to differing theoretical perspectives, and some slight variation in how chapters are structured. We fundamentally believe that diversity is a strength and decided that these slight variations strengthened the report.

Progress was monitored through regular communications. Ultimately all the thematic chapters were placed in a single document and shared across those who co-authored chapters for comment and updating of their own thematic chapters. This process resulted in this final report that will be presented to the U21 Senior Leaders' Group in May 2025.

# Part 1:

## Disability governance norms

**Chapter 1.1.**      **The application of disability norms on representation in higher education**

*Paul Harpur*

**Chapter 1.2.**      **Universities acting collectively to champion disability inclusion**

*Paul Harpur and Wuri Handayani*

**Chapter 1.3.**      **University-wide disability governance**

*Deirdre O'Connor*

**Chapter 1.4.**      **Universities enabling and empowering**

*Brooke Szucs and Gerhard Hoffstaedter*

**Chapter 1.5.**      **Disability and Intersectionality**

*Brooke Szucs, Paul Harpur, Dino Willox, and Nancy Pachana*

## Chapter 1.1.

### The application of disability norms on representation in higher education

Paul Harpur

#### Introduction

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)<sup>1</sup> was drafted on the mantra of “nothing about us, without us”.<sup>2 3 4</sup> Reflecting this new paradigm, the strategies, policies and operational information analysed across the U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Report evinces efforts by universities in the U21 Network to become disability champions of change.

In 2 parts, this chapter will analyse where efforts to become a disability champion of change can be undermined by misunderstanding and misapplying disability norms.

First, the CRPD has created clarity over who can claim to have lived experience of disability and guidance is provided on best practice in implementing such measures.

Secondly, this chapter will address the definition of when a group or organisation can be said to represent persons with disabilities according to international disability norms.

#### Part 1. Representations of lived experience

Disability is a social construct associated with impairment, denial of rights and disadvantage. Although disability is usually associated with negative outcomes, there are situations where lived experience of disability attracts benefits and opportunities. People may misrepresent the extent of their medical condition to gain social security or workers compensation benefits, to compete in a more favourable category in the Paralympics,<sup>5</sup> to gain a reasonable accommodation or adjustment they are not entitled too or to take advantage of measures aimed to reverse disadvantage, such as committee appointments, on grants or in employment.

When championing disability inclusion, universities rightly empower people who have lived experience of disability. Who though has lived experience of disability? The CRPD in Article 1 provides a description which is informative: however, definitions differ across jurisdictions, and then between regulatory interventions in such jurisdictions. Then there are differences between how disability groups may define who can represent the disability community. Practically, universities should comply with international disability norms but also look to how disability is defined in their local laws and reach out to people in their communities who are currently accepted as representing the disability community for guidance.

Beyond engaging with persons with a disability, often others in the community seek to represent the disability community. How should such measures treat people who have previously identified with having a disability, people who have a disability who prefer not to identify as having a disability,

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1 United Nations. (2006). *Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities*. <https://social.desa.un.org/issues/disability/crpd/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities>

2 Harpur, P., & Stein, M. A. (2017). *The convention on the rights of persons with disabilities as a global tipping point for the participation of persons with disabilities*. Oxford Research Encyclopaedia of Politics.

3 Harpur, P., & Stein, M. A. (2018). Universities as disability rights change agents. *Northeastern Law Journal*, 10, 542.

4 Harpur, P. (2021). *Universities as Disability Champions of Change*. TEDx. <https://youtu.be/ehHVV95sn04?si=rYpIFpSlop8l8jgk>

5 Schultz, J. (2024). *When Paralympic athletes fake the extent of their disability*. The Conversation. <https://theconversation.com/when-paralympic-athletes-fake-the-extent-of-their-disability>

people who have no disability themselves, but have a family member with a disability, or are simply allies keen to advance inclusion?

Universities desire to utilise the resources they have to maximise outcomes, yet universities need to ensure structures and language aligns with best practice. A failure to do so can create risks, including:

- When universities call people out as leaders of the disability community. If the disability community within the university and more broadly, alumni, media or government disagree with that assessment, then this will lead to reputational damage and the initiative may fail.
- Beyond reputational damage, erroneous claims can create funding challenges. If lived experience is erroneously claimed in a publication or funding application, then reviewers who recognise the importance of lived experience will view such claims as problematic or even fatal. Further, if lived experience is a condition precedent of the funding or philanthropy, then an intentional falsehood or accidental misrepresentation could result in a breach of contract.
- Additionally, if opportunities aimed at persons with disabilities are being exploited by people without a disability, then this unfairly excludes some of the most disadvantaged members of the university community from opportunities that they should be benefiting from. Although some of these opportunities are limited to people with lived experience of disability, in other situations lived experience of disability can amount to a competitive edge. Illustratively, during 2024 in Australia, the National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability offered PhD Scholarship Opportunities which apply to all U21 Australian universities.<sup>6</sup> Even though lived experience of disability is not necessary, having lived experience of disability or having a person with a disability in the applicant's family would provide the applicant with a competitive edge.

The authority on disability norms globally, the United Nations Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD Committee), in its interpretative guidance in General Comment 7 has clarified who can claim the mantle of lived experience of disability.<sup>7</sup>

General Comment 7 elevates persons with disability as the primary actors in the disability movement, while providing an important secondary role for those who have family members who live with a disability, while also encouraging allies to champion change. This position is illustrated in General Comment 7, where it observes that the positive impact on decision-making processes of the involvement and participation of persons with disabilities... [should be recognised], notably because of their lived experience and best knowledge of rights to be implemented.<sup>8</sup> General Comment 7 draws a distinction between those who have lived experience of disability and family members who have lived experience of supporting persons with lived experience of disability.<sup>9</sup>

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6 National Centre of Excellence in Intellectual Disability Health. (2024). *PhD scholarship opportunities*. <https://www.3dn.unsw.edu.au/PhD-scholarship-opportunities-April-2024.pdf>

7 Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. (2018). *General comment No. 7 on the participation of persons with disabilities, including children with disabilities, through their representative organizations, in the implementation and monitoring of the Convention: Committee on the rights of persons with disabilities*. United Nations. <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record.pdf>

8 ID, at 12.

9 ID, at 75(i)

In providing a role for family members and allies, General Comment 7 explains that these actors should not “undermine” the voices of persons with disabilities.<sup>10</sup> Reflecting this position, General Comment 7 provides examples where family members will be involved in speaking for persons with disabilities. Illustratively, General Comment 7 recognises that persons with certain levels of intellectual disability may require stronger involvement from parents to ensure the voices of the persons with disabilities are included in debates.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, where there are children with disabilities, then their parents have a stronger role in representing their interests.<sup>12</sup>

## **Part 2. When should a university represent a group as representing persons with disabilities?**

Similar to lived experience, there is a distinction between groups that provide support to persons with disabilities or research on persons with disabilities or on impairment, and those groups which can be held out as representing the disability community. Risks surrounding misrepresentation can arise:

- Where the university develops external partnerships with groups that hold themselves out as representing persons with disabilities, but in fact they do not meet this criterion. Beyond reputational damage, this mistake could misdirect well-intentioned initiatives.
- Internally, universities develop voicing structures and research groupings to advance representation of persons with disabilities. If these groups do not meet the definition of a representative organisation, then this can reduce the positive impact of such initiatives.

In General Comment 7, the CRPD Committee provides guidance on when a group or organisation can be said to be representative of the disability community. The Committee highlights the importance of “distinguishing between organizations ‘of’ persons with disabilities, which are composed of and controlled/led by persons with disabilities, and organizations ‘for’ persons with disabilities”.<sup>13</sup> Although both types of groups play an important role, it is important to understand when a group can claim the mantle of a disabled persons organisations (DPOs) to ensure each group is assigned the appropriate role in activities. Disability led networks, steering groups or research groups within a university are a helpful resource on understanding the disability landscape.

## **Conclusion**

The elevation of individuals with disabilities within the disability movement mirrors similar struggles in other areas of social justice. It is crucial to accurately apply disability norms to ensure the success of initiatives aimed at inclusion. Misrepresentation of lived experiences and the improper designation of representative organisations can lead to reputational damage, funding challenges, and the exclusion of those who genuinely need support. By adhering to international disability norms and engaging with local communities, universities can become true champions of change, fostering an environment where the voices of persons with disabilities are authentically represented and valued. This approach not only aligns with best practices but also maximises the positive impact of inclusion efforts.

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<sup>10</sup> ID, at 37

<sup>11</sup> ID, at 14(d)

<sup>12</sup> ID, 14(e)

<sup>13</sup> ID, at 15

## Chapter 1.2.

### Universities acting collectively to champion disability inclusion

Paul Harpur and Wuri Handayani

#### Introduction

This chapter focuses on the positive role universities working together can have on promoting disability inclusion. To advance a shared interest, universities can act collectively through an ad hoc arrangement or through forming and funding an ongoing association, consortia or network. Groups, such as Universitas 21 (U21),<sup>14</sup> the European University Association,<sup>15</sup> or Universities Australia,<sup>16</sup> include a corporate structure, recognisable brand, joint activities, and a directorate and secretariat to coordinate and facilitate member collective activities. Through pooling resources, creating a collective voice and through shared expertise and knowledge creation, member universities achieve more collectively than they could acting alone.

In 4 parts this chapter will analyse how universities acting collectively through networks can advance disability inclusion. First, this chapter will illustrate the need for collective action with a case study. Part 1 will provide a case study on how a new member university in the U21 Network, Universitas Gadjah Mada (UGM), one of the leading research-focused universities in Indonesia, aims to benefit from collective action on disability inclusion. Second, this chapter will explore how U21 has taken steps to adopt an EDI framework and is forming a governance structure to ensure this framework is realised. Third this chapter will explore interventions by the European University Association and illustrate the limitation of project-based funding. Finally, this chapter will use Universities Australia's Indigenous governance strategy and framework to illustrate how lasting changes can be achieved by resourcing, committed individuals and effective governance frameworks.

#### Part 1. A case study on Universitas Gadjah Mada: How collective action can change lives

UGM, one of the leading research-focused universities in Indonesia, became a U21 member as of 1 August 2023. Whereas other U21 universities have operated in higher education regulatory and policy environments that have advanced disability inclusion for decades, universities in Indonesia operate in an environment where disability inclusion is more recently gained regulatory and policy attention.

Indonesia has increased attention on advancing disability inclusion in higher education. Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia affirms the right of every citizen to education. This is further reinforced by Law No. 20 of 2003, also known as the National Education Law, which recognises the rights of all citizens to education, inclusive of individuals with disabilities, and mandates the provision of special education resources in both inclusive and specialised educational settings<sup>17</sup>. In addition, the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture promulgated Regulation No. 70 of 2009 concerning inclusive education, which requires all educational institutions to accept students with disabilities and to offer them equitable learning opportunities through the development of inclusive educational practices<sup>18</sup>. Following the ratification of the Convention on the

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<sup>14</sup> Universitas 21. (n.d.). <https://universitas21.com>

<sup>15</sup> European University Association. (n.d.). <https://www.eua.eu/>

<sup>16</sup> Universities Australia. (n.d.). <https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/>

<sup>17</sup> UNESCO. (n.d.). *Indonesia - Inclusion*. <https://education-profiles.org/eastern-and-south-eastern-asia/indonesia/-inclusion>

<sup>18</sup> INOVASI. (2022). *Policy brief 6: Inclusive education in Indonesia (2011-2019)*. <https://www.inovasi.or.id/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/Policy-Brief-6-Inclusive-2011-2019.pdf>

Rights of Persons with Disabilities, Indonesia enacted Law No. 8 of 2016, which guarantees the right to inclusive education for every citizen<sup>19</sup>. Consequently, educational institutions are obligated to provide reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities to ensure their equal enjoyment of educational rights. Practically, the Indonesian government also established Government Regulation No. 13 of 2020, addressing reasonable accommodations within education and other sectors. This regulation mandates that schools and universities furnish assistive technologies, ensure accessible facilities, and develop inclusive curricula.

Specifically for higher education institutions, the Indonesian Minister of Education and Culture issued Regulation No. 46 of 2017 regarding inclusive education, which recommends the establishment of disability service units within higher education facilities. Furthermore, the Indonesian Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) released guidelines to support services for students with disabilities in higher education in 2017<sup>20</sup>.

Although the regulations offer a comprehensive framework, numerous challenges persist, particularly within the realm of higher education in Indonesia. Firstly, merely 2.8% of individuals with disabilities have attained a higher education degree (National Socio-Economic Survey, 2020)<sup>21</sup>. This low percentage underscores the barriers faced by students in pursuing higher education, which include limited access, insufficiently accessible facilities, inadequate support services, and prevalent social stigma.

Furthermore, the prevalence of Disability Service Units (DSUs) within Indonesia's higher education landscape is markedly low. As of May 2024, approximately 115 universities or 2.88% of more than 4,000 higher education institutions in Indonesia have established DSUs<sup>22</sup>. This statistic highlights that the overwhelming majority of universities and colleges have yet to implement such units, which are essential for facilitating inclusive education and providing support for students with disabilities. For example, UGM in Yogyakarta inaugurated its DSU on December 20, 2024, thereby demonstrating its commitment to fostering an inclusive campus environment.

As a newly established institution, DSU UGM faces a multitude of challenges. Firstly, it is imperative for UGM to formulate a policy regarding individuals with disabilities that reflects a commitment to fostering diversity, equality, and the eradication of discrimination in its practices, policies, and procedures. Secondly, there exists a significant lack of awareness concerning disability among faculty members and non-disabled students. Thirdly, the limited accessibility of infrastructure may hinder the provision of comprehensive services to students with disabilities. Therefore, it is essential to collaborate and exchange knowledge with other universities, particularly those within the U21 Network, to learn best practices. Specifically, we must seek to understand how to implement reasonable adjustments, develop inclusive policies, and embrace universal design in learning.

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19 UNESCO. (n.d.). *Indonesia - Inclusion*. <https://education-profiles.org/eastern-and-south-eastern-asia/indonesia/-inclusion>

20 Ministry of Research and Technology/National Agency for Research and Innovation. (n.d.). *Service guidance for students with disabilities in university – general directorate of learning and student affairs*. <https://www.its.ac.id/sustainability/Service-Guidance-for-Students-with-Disabilities-in-University-General-Directorate-of-Learning-and-Student-Affairs-Ministry-of-Research-and-TechnologyNationa.pdf>

21 Barnum, M. (2024). *Report: Almost all disabled students lack access to college readiness programs*. <https://www.the74million.org/article/report-almost-all-disabled-students-lack-access-to-college-readiness-programs/>

22 Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of Indonesia. (n.d.). *Unit layanan disabilitas [Disability services unit]*. <https://ptinklusif.kemdikbud.go.id/unit-layanan-disabilitas>

## Part 2. U21 on EDI and disability inclusion

U21 brings 29 leading global universities together to share excellence, knowledge, and experiences on areas including EDI and disability inclusion. This part explains how U21 is facilitating its members to advance a more inclusive world.

Throughout 2023 and 2024, the U21 EDI Working Group developed a Network-wide framework on EDI. In April 2024, the U21 Senior Leaders' Group adopted the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement.<sup>23</sup> This framework aims to amplify the U21 Network's positive impact across the globe by championing initiatives that promote and embed EDI.

Through realising 3 principles, the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement aims to create a globally interconnected network of universities where member institutions value and promote equity, celebrate diversity, and champion inclusion and belonging in all internationalisation and network initiatives and programs. The first principle fosters equitable partnerships among universities that recognises historical and contemporary power dynamics, while fostering participatory knowledge sharing to support collective engagement. The second principle commits the Network to ensuring that global education and connections are universally accessible, so that their transformative potential should be extended to every member of the U21 Network. Finally, Principle 3 commits the U21 Network to championing diverse and inclusive leadership in all the Network's programs and activities and ensuring equitable representation from across the network in governance and stakeholder groups that encourage diverse insights. This third principle includes ensuring that the policies and practices of the U21 Secretariat foster EDI at all levels of organisational decision-making.

To help advance the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement, and also in the April 2024 meeting, the U21 Senior Leaders' Group commissioned the U21 Disability Community of Practice to perform a U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Report. The U21 Disability Community of Practice had been formed by Professor Robert Greenberg from the University of Auckland and Professor Paul Harpur from The University of Queensland in 2023.<sup>24</sup> The U21 Disability Community of Practice aims to address policies and approaches relevant to issues such as how members promote awareness of the capacity and success of academic, professional and administrative staff with disabilities, and how universities support the career pathways of university staff as they seek to advance through the ranks to levels such as director, professor, dean, and other senior leadership roles.<sup>25</sup>

Beyond a standalone report on disability inclusion, the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement now has an oversight group. To implement this framework, the U21 EDI Working Group has expanded and formed a U21 EDI Committee. At the time of writing, the expressions of interest for this committee had been received' however, the governance documents and appointments to this committee were still being finalised. It is the hope that the U21 EDI Committee should learn from other university collective efforts, including the European University Association and Universities Australia.

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<sup>23</sup> Universitas 21. (n.d.) EDI. <https://universitas21.com/collaborative-areas/edi/>

<sup>24</sup> Universitas 21. (2024). *Disability champions of change*. <https://universitas21.com/news/disability-champions-change/>

<sup>25</sup> Universitas 21. (n.d.) EDI. <https://universitas21.com/collaborative-areas/edi/>

### Part 3. Disability Inclusion and the European University Association

The European University Association is the collective voice of the universities of Europe.<sup>26</sup> For over 2 decades, the European University Association has played a key role in building university communities across the whole of Europe and creating a coherent system for European higher education and research. The European University Association is a community of over 900 members and affiliates. It represents universities and national rectors' conferences in 49 European countries, as well as affiliated organisations and networks based both in and beyond Europe.

The European University Association champions a range of ongoing initiatives on diversity. For illustration, the European University Association supports attention to and more consistent application of the Lisbon Recognition Convention, whereby signatories commit to "develop engaged with higher education institutions and support organisations that support populations with a refugee(-like) background."<sup>27</sup> This includes direct measures to support this population, and at the policy level, advocating for access for at-risk academics and existing students, and for the creation of new EU grants and fellowship programs.

In contrast to other diversity areas, the European University Association does not have any ongoing disability inclusion initiatives published on their website. Rather than a dedicated program of work with resourcing, disability inclusion is advanced on an ad hoc basis where they advertise and support workshops, funding opportunities, and research reports. The European University Association workshops can provide a platform for externally funded research. For example, the 2024 AccessibleEU: Accessibility and [Higher Education Working](#) together to build a more accessible European Union for persons with disabilities workshop includes a presentation on the Erasmus funded project European Network of Inclusive Universities.<sup>28</sup> The EUni4all-Network project produced a network of European universities working for the inclusion of students with disabilities web platform.<sup>29</sup> The web platform collected and presented data and ratings on 42 universities across 15 European countries across the European University Association. This included star ratings on universities such as Charles University,<sup>30</sup> Cyprus University of Technology,<sup>31</sup> Trinity College Dublin,<sup>32</sup> the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens,<sup>33</sup> Stockholm University,<sup>34</sup> University of Eastern Finland,<sup>35</sup> University of Lorraine,<sup>36</sup> University of Porto,<sup>37</sup> and University of Seville.<sup>38</sup> These universities were rated against a criteria including policies and accessible buildings, digital spaces,

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26 European University Association. (n.d.). <https://www.eua.eu/>

27 European University Association. (n.d.). *At-risk academics and students*. <https://www.eua.eu/our-work/topics/at-risk-academics-and-students.html>

28 European University Association. (2024). *Agenda and concept note for 2024 annual conference*. [https://www.eua.eu/AGENDA\\_AND\\_CONCEPT\\_NOTE\\_acc.pdf](https://www.eua.eu/AGENDA_AND_CONCEPT_NOTE_acc.pdf)

29 Fundación ONCE. (n.d.). *Inclusive universities network*. <https://inclusive-universities-network.fundaciononce.es/>

30 Fundación ONCE. (2022). *Charles University (Univerzita Karlova) – EUni4ALL Network*. <https://inclusive-universities-network.fundaciononce.es/universities/university/charles-university-univerzita-karlova>

31 Fundación ONCE. (n.d.). *Cyprus University of Technology – EUni4ALL Network*. <https://inclusive-universities-network.fundaciononce.es/universities/university/cyprus-university-of-technology>

32 Fundación ONCE. (2022). *Trinity College Dublin – EUni4ALL Network*. <https://inclusive-universities-network.fundaciononce.es/universities/university/trinity-college-dublin>

33 Fundación ONCE. (n.d.). *National and Kapodistrian University of Athens – EUni4ALL Network*. <https://inclusive-universities-network.fundaciononce.es/universities/university/national-and-kapodistrian-university-of-athens>

34 Fundación ONCE. (n.d.). *Stockholm University – EUni4ALL Network*. <https://inclusive-universities-network.fundaciononce.es/universities/university/stockholm-university>

35 Fundación ONCE. (n.d.). *University of Eastern Finland – EUni4ALL Network*. <https://inclusive-universities-network.fundaciononce.es/universities/university/university-of-eastern-finland>

36 Fundación ONCE. (n.d.). *University of Lorraine – EUni4ALL Network*. <https://inclusive-universities-network.fundaciononce.es/universities/university/university-of-lorraine>

37 Fundación ONCE. (n.d.). *University of Porto – EUni4ALL Network*. <https://inclusive-universities-network.fundaciononce.es/universities/university/university-of-porto>

38 Fundación ONCE. (n.d.). *University of Seville – EUni4ALL Network*. <https://inclusive-universities-network.fundaciononce.es/universities/university/university-of-seville>

activities and teaching. Even though the website remains live, updating ended more than 2 years ago, in 2022, when the funding ended.

European University Association funding on disability appears to be directed on projects which include disability as one of all diversity attributes. For example, the 2019 diversity, equity and inclusion in European higher education institutions: results from the INVITED Project collected data from 159 universities and included disability.<sup>39</sup> In contrast, other initiatives promoted by the European University Association have been funded by other bodies. For example, the European University Association publicised a sports scholarship opportunity for up to 20 students with disabilities as a result of the partnership between European University Sports Association (EUSA), European Universities Games Zagreb – Rijeka 2016 (EUG 2016), Cotrugli Business School (CBS), and the European Paralympic Committee (EPC)<sup>40</sup>

#### **Part 4. Universities Australia as a best practice example on diversity governance: A sector-wide Indigenous strategy and lived experience governance committee**

Even though Universities Australia (UA) has not published initiatives focusing on disability, Australian universities have acted to collectively advance Indigenous inclusion in higher education. The Universities Australia Indigenous Strategy 2017–20 was the first sector-wide initiative that brought all member universities together to achieve common goals to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and success in higher education.<sup>41</sup> During the implementation of this strategy, and in the lead up to the next strategy, in February 2021 the Universities Australia Deputy Vice Chancellor (DVC) / Pro Vice Chancellor (PVC) Indigenous Committee was established.<sup>42</sup> The Committee is comprised of either the DVC or PVC Indigenous from each member university, or where that university does not have a DVC or PVC Indigenous, the most senior Indigenous staff member in an Indigenous-specific role. The DVC / PVC Committee was integral in the development of the new Indigenous Strategy 2022–25 and is central in its implementation providing essential advice to UA.

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<sup>39</sup>European University Association. (n.d.). *Diversity, equity, and inclusion in European higher education institutions*.

<https://www.eua.eu/equityandinclusionineuropeanhighereducationinstitutions.pdf>

<sup>40</sup>European University Sports Association. (n.d.). *Education and sports for people with disabilities*. <https://www.eusa.eu/whats-up-education-and-sports-for-people-with-disabilities>

<sup>41</sup>Universities Australia. (n.d.). *Indigenous higher education*. <https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/policy-submissions/diversity-equity/indigenous-higher-education/>

<sup>42</sup>Universities Australia. (n.d.). *Indigenous higher education*. <https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/policy-submissions/diversity-equity/indigenous-higher-education/>

The new UA Indigenous Strategy 2022–25 shifts the focus from aspiration to implementation with actionable commitments outlined under 5 key themes.<sup>43</sup>

1. Student success
2. Staff success
3. University responsibility for Indigenous advancement
4. Racism and cultural safety
5. Recognising the value Indigenous people and knowledges bring to the university and embedding Indigenous value systems and knowledges into university structures.

The development and implementation of this Strategy is led by Indigenous leaders in universities through the DVC / PVC Indigenous Committee. Overall, the approach UA has taken to advancing Indigenous inclusion in higher education has been transformational and operates as a best practice guide to how inclusion could be advanced for disability by UA and other university networks.

## Recommendations

- a) **Foster equitable partnerships:** the U21 Network should continue to foster equitable partnerships among its member universities, recognising historical and contemporary power dynamics. Participatory knowledge sharing should be encouraged to support collective engagement and mutual learning.
- b) **Ensuring disability representation:** this chapter recommends that the U21 EDI Committee integrate disability inclusion throughout the U21 Framework for Equitable and Inclusive Global Engagement. This should be achieved by first realising disability inclusion in Principle 3 on leadership. Specifically, by ensuring disability representation from across the network in governance and stakeholder groups that encourage diverse insights.
- c) **Develop a disability inclusion action plan:** similar to the approach adopted by UA Australia on advancing Indigenous inclusion, the U21 disability leaders should be encouraged to explore how an U21 disability inclusion action plan could be developed and advanced, so that disability inclusion across the U21 Network can be advanced consistently and sustainably.

## Conclusion

Drawing from the development of U21's EDI initiatives, the experiences from the European University Association, Universities Australia, and more broadly from this U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Report, this chapter concludes, while project-based initiatives can enhance knowledge and drive progress, such measures risk becoming outdated without continuous updates and sustained efforts. Further, individual universities acting alone can struggle to identify economies of scale when it comes to disability inclusion policy development. This chapter has highlighted the importance of collective action among universities to champion disability inclusion.

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<sup>43</sup> Universities Australia. (2022). *Indigenous strategy 2022–2025*. <https://universitiesaustralia.edu.au/publication/indigenous-strategy-2022-25/>

## Chapter 1.3.

### University-wide disability governance

Deirdre O'Connor

#### Introduction

Drawing upon the responses to the U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Survey, this chapter will review disability governance arrangements for disability inclusion across U21 member universities. Specifically, survey respondents were asked to describe the structures that have been adopted to govern disability inclusion within their institutions; report the extent to which disability is identified as a priority within their overall university strategic plans or university-wide EDI plans; report whether specific university-wide disability inclusion plans are in place and identify the extent to which such plans are linked to policies to advance disability inclusion; identify the mechanisms used within their institutions to collect and report qualitative and quantitative data on staff and students with disabilities. The survey feedback provided by the U21 member universities is summarised below along with commentary on the overall / collective picture generated by the responses.

#### Method

The U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Survey asked respondents to describe the structures that are in place to govern disability inclusion across their universities. Responses were received from 18 member universities with varying degrees of detail. The data variability might stem from the survey respondent's lack of access to or awareness of their university's data.

#### Summary of Governance, Planning Arrangements and Data Collection Measures for Disability Inclusion

A summary of the data received to the U21 Disability Inclusion Policy Mapping Survey is contained in the table below.

Institution	Governance of Disability Inclusion	University / EDI-wide Strategic Planning Focus	Disability-specific Planning Focus	Disability Data Collection / Reporting
University of Auckland	Office of the Pro Vice-Chancellor Equity provides leadership on fulfilling the University's commitment to broad issues of equity, diversity and inclusion in employment and education. Unclear how specific issues on disability inclusion are addressed at this level.	Responded that accessible, equitable lifelong higher education opportunities are mentioned in its strategic plan, but that disability is not specifically addressed.	Responded that the University's Disability Action Plan describes how the vision and principles of the University are brought to life in partnership with people with disability.	The University reported a disabled student count of 4,299 (9%) and a disabled staff count of 902 (7%) in 2023.

Institution	Governance of Disability Inclusion	University / EDI-wide Strategic Planning Focus	Disability-specific Planning Focus	Disability Data Collection / Reporting
University of Birmingham	Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Committee is chaired by the University Provost. The Accessibility Oversight Group (AOG) is chaired by the Deputy Pro-Vice Chancellor for EDI and feeds into the EDI Committee.	Response points to the University's Strategic Framework document which references their commitment building a culture which is supportive and inclusive. The document does not contain any direct reference to disability.	Responded that University has signed up to the Disability Confident Scheme, a government scheme designed to encourage employers to recruit, retain and develop disabled people and those with health conditions. The University has also published an Access and Participation Plan (APP) with the Office for Students (OfS) that defines its commitment to widening participation. New Equality Strategy 2025-2028 currently under consultation has a greater focus on disability and accessibility.	Reported that in August 2023, 6.0% of staff declared a disability of any kind. Data on the proportions of disabled staff in different roles/at different grades is also available. With respect to students, 14.4% of students declared having one or multiple forms of disability. A detailed breakdown of the student disability statistics is also available.
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile	Reported that they have a Program for Inclusion for Students with Special Needs. The governance arrangements are unclear. No mention of structures relevant for staff.	The response references their University Strategy, identifying measures aimed at eliminating barriers to entry, progression and participation in university life. There is no specific reference to disability.	Not available	Not available
University of Connecticut	Survey response received but no information on governance provided.	Survey response received but no information on strategic planning provided.	The University has a Policy statement relating to People with Disabilities, setting out its commitment to achieving equal educational and employment opportunity and full participation for persons with disabilities, ensuring the same access to programs, opportunities, and activities at the University as all others.	Survey response received but no data provided.
University College Dublin	University Management Team (UMT) established the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) to promote an inclusive and diverse work and study environment for all. Disability inclusion is a core component of its remit. The EDI group is chaired by the Vice President for Equality, Diversity and Inclusion who is a member of the University Management Team.	Response notes that its most recent Strategy to 2030 cites inclusion as one of the core values underpinning all its activities but does not specifically refer to disability.	Response notes that the University has an EDI Strategy and Action Plan which includes specific references to Disability. It also has a policy for the Employment of Persons with Disabilities.	Reported that data on students with disabilities are collected via its annual Widening Participation Report and via the national Higher Education Authority Equal Access Survey on new entrants into Higher Education in Ireland. Data on staff and students who identify as being neurodivergent was reported in the recent UCD-wide survey on Neurodiversity. Data on staff with disabilities are collected via the annual EDI Survey. Data from 2023 show that 12% of staff consider themselves to have a disability. Further detail by staff role is not available publicly but is available on request from the University's EDI Unit.

Institution	Governance of Disability Inclusion	University / EDI-wide Strategic Planning Focus	Disability-specific Planning Focus	Disability Data Collection / Reporting
The University of Edinburgh	Reported on a range of networking and support initiatives aimed at staff, students and their carers, some of which are linked in with the University's HR Division. Unclear on how these initiatives are linked in with the relevant governance structures.	No information received	Response indicated that there is a detailed Action Plan on Disability but not easily accessible, so it was not possible to report on its contents.	No information received
University of Glasgow	The University has a Disability Equality Champion who is connected to the Equality and Diversity Strategy Committee (EDSC), the University Principal and other senior managers. The role of the University's (EDSC) includes advising and making recommendations to the University's Court, Senate and the Senior Management Group.	Response notes that there are some mentions of EDI generally in their strategic planning documents, but nothing disability specific.	No information received	No information received
The University of Hong Kong	Reported that it has implemented a comprehensive governance structure to ensure disability inclusion. The key governing bodies are the Council and the Senate. Council is responsible for overall compliance with employment laws, including Disability Discrimination legislation. Senate is responsible for providing for the welfare of students, including those with disabilities.	The response is that its strategic plan contains a commitment to embracing equality, ethics, inclusivity, diversity, and transparency in all its activities. They suggest that while there is no explicit reference to disability, it is addressed indirectly via this statement.	Responded that the University has established an Equal Opportunity Policy to safeguard the inclusion of all staff and students on campus, including those with disabilities.	Reported that regarding data collection on disabilities, staff are required to disclose disabilities. No data available re staff. Re students, for the academic year 2023/24, 516 students declared their disabilities/SEN conditions, comprising 1.3% of the total student population.
KU Leuven	Reported that all disability resources are connected to Disability Officers. The governance arrangements are unclear.	The response is that the situation is unknown due to lack of access to the relevant documentation.	Reported that it has a diversity policy and plan, but they do not contain any measures specific to disability. The diversity policy/plan are not generally available for consultation. Access is restricted to staff and students only.	Reported that these statistics are unavailable.
Lund University	Survey response received but no information on governance provided.	Survey response received but no information on strategic planning provided.	No information available.	Reported that in 2023, 2800 students were granted study support measures due to a long-term disability. There is no precise way to express these numbers as a proportion of the student population since the systems are not built to handle this.  Data are not collected regarding staff.

Institution	Governance of Disability Inclusion	University / EDI-wide Strategic Planning Focus	Disability-specific Planning Focus	Disability Data Collection / Reporting
University of Maryland	Disability Summit was established in 2016 as a forum for dialogue and collaboration across types of disability and institutions. No information provided on the governance of this structure.	Survey response received but no information on strategic planning provided. Response indicates that accessibility of courses is discussed, but no detail provided.	The response indicated that there are policies and procedures in place but not a plan. It is not clear if these relate specifically to disability or EDI more generally.	Reported that 3,414 students are registered with their Accessibility and Disability Service (ADS) in 2023 which represents 8.4% of the student body.  No information available regarding staff.
McMaster University	Feedback provided on governance of accessibility. Key structure is McMaster Accessibility Advisory Council. Unclear how this is linked to wider relevant governance structures.	The response provided points to its Institutional Priorities document, in which the issues related to disability inclusion and accessibility are specifically highlighted.	The response identified a number of high-level plans and associated guidelines, most of which related to accessibility.	At McMaster University the following areas collect data related to persons with disabilities: - Employment Equity Census - Student Accessibility Services collects robust internal data on students with disabilities - Equity and Inclusion Office collects data related to any human rights complaints or consultations submitted by persons with disabilities.
The University of Melbourne	The University's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Sub-Committee (DEISCo), has oversight of its Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP). The DEISCo reports directly to the University Executive which is the most senior management committee of the University.	Institutional Strategy doesn't mention disability directly but does address inclusivity broadly. Institutional Diversity and Inclusion Policy mentions disability specifically.	Disability Action Inclusion Plan overseen by University's DEI Sub Committee.	Reported that approximately 10% of students identify as people with disability. Reliable data on the proportion of staff with disability is currently not available and has been identified as an area to be addressed.
Tecnológico de Monterrey	Reported that it has an advisory committee on persons with disabilities which is overseen by the University's Office of Diversity and Inclusion. Unclear how these arrangements are linked to wider University governance structures.	The response notes that the institution's strategic plan has a focus on EDI in general but does not mention disability specifically.	The response indicated that there is a general inclusion policy but nothing specific to disability.	No response received
University of Nottingham	Pro-Vice Chancellor for EDI sits on the University Executive Board. A steering group for staff and students focused on disability equality sits on the University's Intersectionality and Inclusion Oversight Group. Not clear how these structures are linked into wider governance arrangements.	The response notes that disability inclusion is not directly mentioned in its overall Strategy document, but it does feature in its institutional-wide equality, diversity and inclusion priorities.	Disability Equality Action Plan was launched in October 2024.	Reported that in 2023/24, 24% of undergrad students shared information about a disability, as did 13% of taught postgrads and 22% of research postgraduates. No information on staff provided.

Institution	Governance of Disability Inclusion	University / EDI-wide Strategic Planning Focus	Disability-specific Planning Focus	Disability Data Collection / Reporting
The University of Queensland	Key structure is the University Senate Sub-Committee on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (SCEDI). The SCEDI provides oversight of all diversity issues, including disability. Under the SCEDI, a EDI Management Committee is chaired by the Deputy Provost which includes the leads of each EDI plan, including the chair of the Disability Inclusion Group.	The response provided notes that disability is not directly mentioned in the UQ Strategic Plan 2022-2025. However, diversity and promoting the University's engagement with the Brisbane 2032 Paralympics are referenced.	The response noted that the University has had various iterations of a university-wide disability inclusion strategy in the form of Disability Action Plans since 1999. The current Disability Action Plan 2023-2025 includes a vision and operational activities assigned to actors across the university, including in teaching, human resources, property and facilities, the library, marketing, research capacity building, and more.	The University of Queensland reported that approximately 7% of the student population but reported that they were unable to find the source of this data. No data on staff were reported.
The University of Sydney	Disability inclusion initiatives are monitored by the University's Disability Inclusion Action Plan (DIAP) Implementation group which reports regularly to the University Executive.	The response provided notes that disability is directly mentioned in its Sydney in 2032 Strategy as one of a range of diversity factors that they aim to support.	The response noted the that the University has a Disability Inclusion Action Plan which has been extended to 2025.	Reported that data on staff and students with disabilities is collected through self-identification measures in student records system and HR system respectively. Data on different staff categories who are disabled is available. With respect to student data, in 2023-2024, almost 11% of undergraduates identified as disabled, as did 6% of postgraduates undertaking coursework and 10% of those undertaking Higher Degrees by research.
Waseda University	Reported that its Office for Promotion of Equality and Diversity provides disability support for students, amongst other key diversity areas. Governance of this structure is unclear.	The response provided was that disability is not mentioned in its strategic planning documents.	The response noted that the University has a policy in place but not a plan. It is not clear whether the policy refers specifically to disability or not.	The response provided was that these statistics are unavailable to the person completing the survey.
University of Zurich	There is a position in the Vice-Rectorate that deals with disability inclusion at a strategic university-wide level.	The response provided is that the institution's diversity policy is committed to ensuring that all members, including people with disabilities, can participate in the university without discrimination. However, there is no official strategy addressing the barriers to participation experienced by people with disabilities in the institution, so the topic is addressed only indirectly.	The response pointed to the University's UZH Accessible Project which has the goal of identifying and removing barriers for people with disabilities over the long term.	Response not provided

## Analysis

### Governance of disability inclusion

The results from the survey show a mixed picture in terms of the extent to which university-level governance structures address disability issues specifically. In some cases, governance of disability inclusion is subsumed under the governance of EDI more generally, while in other cases, respondents reported that governance arrangements are unclear or unknown. Having said that, there are some cases where the structures and levels of governance specific to disability inclusion are more clearly and easily identifiable. These institutions include the University of Birmingham, University College Dublin, University of Glasgow, The University of Hong Kong, The University of Melbourne, The University of Queensland, The University of Sydney and the University of Zurich.

### Strategic Planning Focus

Respondents were asked to report the extent to which disability inclusion is identified as a priority within their universities' overall strategic plans or within university-wide EDI plans. They were also asked to identify the extent to which such plans are linked to university policies to advance disability inclusion. Responses were received from 15 universities.

Again, the results show a mixed picture in terms of level of detail available and the extent to which disability is mentioned directly or indirectly in university strategic planning documents. Most responses received indicated that disability inclusion is not named specifically as a priority area for planning and associated policies and developments, but more typically, it is subsumed under broader EDI planning initiatives. McMaster University and The University of Sydney were exceptions in this regard, as disability inclusion is named specifically as an area of focus in their university-level strategic planning arrangements.

### Disability-Specific Planning Focus

Respondents were asked to report on the extent to which their universities have a specific institution-wide disability plan or strategic document – over and above their previously discussed university-wide strategic plans. They were also asked to identify the extent to which such plans are linked to relevant policies and procedures.

Responses were received from 16 universities. The data provided by respondents varied widely in terms of the detail provided and the level of specificity / relevance to the question asked. In some instances, respondents pointed to detailed Disability Action Plans and their associated guidelines / procedures for implementation (University of Auckland, University of Birmingham, University of Connecticut; University College Dublin; McMaster University; The University of Melbourne; The University of Queensland; The University of Sydney; University of Zurich); others reported on disability policies which existed in the context of broader EDI policies (The University of Hong Kong; Tecnológico de Monterrey), and in some cases plans were not provided by the respondent (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, University of Glasgow, Lund University).

### Collection and Reporting of Disability-related Data

Respondents were asked about the mechanisms by which their institutions collect qualitative and quantitative data on students and staff with disabilities. They were also asked to provide such data for a wide range of student and staff categories. Responses were received from 14 universities.

In general, sources of student data were more readily identifiable and available, while the picture in relation to staff data was more mixed. Some institutions were in a position to report on the numbers and proportions of students and staff in different roles who were identified as disabled (University of Auckland, University of Birmingham; University College Dublin; The University of Hong Kong; The University of Sydney). Others reported on student data only (Lund University; University

of Maryland; The University of Melbourne), while others the respondent did not provide any relevant data sources (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, The University of Edinburgh, University of Glasgow, KU Leuven; Tecnológico de Monterrey, Waseda University; University of Zurich).

## Recommendations

- a) **Establish clear leadership roles on disability governance:** Universities should create clear disability governance leadership structures. This should include leadership on diversity generally, through a dedicated DVC or PVC role that is supported by authority and resources. Additionally, universities should appoint a senior executive specifically targeting disability inclusion across the university. Universities should strive to appoint individuals with lived experience of disability to lead disability governance and to be employed within the team to operationalise the university's disability inclusion strategy. This role should include activities across all areas of the university operation. This role should have clear Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and well-defined responsibilities to ensure accountability and progress.
- b) **Strategic integration and support:** Inclusion should be prioritised on strategic agendas where relevant and must be specifically included in plans to operationalise the university's strategic plan, such as through disability action plans. The complementing of strategic plans with operational plans ensures that disability inclusion responsibilities are distributed across the institution and not solely placed on one individual or unit. The distribution of responsibility will require KPIs placed on those who have disability inclusion responsibility across the university. These KPIs should form part of existing reporting and performance appraisal processes to maximise accountability and compliance.
- c) **Funding and staffing disability inclusion governance:** Universities must provide adequate funding and staffing to enable disability diversity initiatives can be implemented. This includes central funding for accessibility improvements and resources for compliance activities, program development, and network building. Ideally this includes the establishment of a support framework and unit within the university to assist the EDI lead in fulfilling their mission. This ensures that the diversity inclusion lead is not overwhelmed and can effectively drive change.
- d) **Collecting data on staff with disability and continuous improvement on disability governance:** Universities should continuously seek feedback from the university community, including collecting data on staff with disabilities and the barriers they experience, and adapt disability strategies and practices accordingly. This ensures that initiatives remain relevant and effective in addressing the needs of diverse groups.

## Conclusion

The survey responses from U21 member universities reveal a diverse landscape of disability governance and inclusion practices. While some institutions have established clear and dedicated structures for disability governance, others integrate these responsibilities within broader EDI frameworks. The strategic prioritisation of disability inclusion varies, with only a few universities explicitly naming it in their strategic plans. Specific disability action plans are more common, though their linkage to broader policies and procedures is mixed. Data collection on disability appears more robust for students than for staff, with several respondents able to provide detailed statistics on disabled student populations.

## Chapter 1.4.

### Universities enabling and empowering

Brooke Szucs and Gerhard Hoffstaedter

#### Introduction

The U21 Network operates across diverse cultural and social contexts worldwide. Each of the 21 countries in which member universities are based has distinct social and historical approaches to disability inclusion, which shape how accessibility and leadership manifest within university environments. This variation is apparent in the realm of disability leadership, particularly in areas that directly impact the access and inclusion of disabled students, staff, and community members.

Historically, decision-making on disability-related issues has been led by non-disabled individuals, particularly within the medical and social work sectors, who have determined policies and support mechanisms without necessarily consulting or including those directly affected. However, sustained advocacy from disability rights movements has shifted this paradigm, leading to the principle of 'Nothing about us, without us,' which emphasises the necessity of involving disabled individuals in decision-making processes that affect them.

Recent scholarship by Harpur and Stein<sup>44</sup> has further developed this expectation, advocating for 'Nothing about us, unless it is led by us'. This approach underscores the importance of disabled individuals not only being included but actively leading efforts to shape policies, programs, and institutional structures. Within the university context, this principle calls for disabled individuals to lead accessibility committees, disability employee resource groups, and student-led disability organisations.

This chapter examines how this principle is enacted within disability groups across the U21 Network by addressing the following key questions:

1. What disability-focused groups exist within U21 member institutions?
2. Do these groups explicitly claim and demonstrate disability-led leadership?

Through this analysis, the chapter aims to assess the extent to which disability leadership is embedded within institutional structures, highlight best practices, and identify areas for further development to ensure meaningful representation and leadership by disabled individuals across the network.

#### Method

##### Types of Disability Inclusion Groups in U21 Institutions

A variety of disability inclusion groups exist within universities, ranging from faculty-based disability subcommittees to social groups and condition-specific support networks. Given the diversity of these groups, we selected 3 key types for analysis due to their consistency across institutions and their level of representation within university structures:<sup>45</sup>

1. **University-Wide Disability Committees (committees):** These committees operate at an institutional level and play a formal role in consulting on policy, strategic direction, and

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<sup>44</sup> Harpur, P., & Stein, M. (2022). *The convention on the rights of persons with disabilities as a global tipping point for the participation of persons with disabilities*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. <https://oxfordre.com/politics/view/>

<sup>45</sup> Harpur, P., & Szucs, B. (2024). Disability and mobilization work. In O. Branzei and A. Zeyen (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to disability and work* (1st ed.). Routledge. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003350781dx>

university-wide decision-making regarding disability inclusion. Broader EDI committees were excluded from our analysis due to the challenge of accurately assessing disability representation within them.

2. **Student Advocacy Groups:** Typically affiliated with student unions, these groups represent disabled students in university decision-making, advocating for accessibility, inclusion, and community-building. Their primary role is both advocacy-based and social, providing a space for students with disabilities to connect while ensuring their voices are heard in institutional processes.
3. **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Staff disability networks function similarly to student disability organisations by fostering a sense of belonging and advocating for the needs of disabled employees. These groups often liaise with university leadership to promote inclusive workplace policies and practices.

By focusing on these 3 categories, this study aims to assess how institutions formally integrate disability leadership and advocacy across different stakeholder groups within the U21 Network.

### Data collection method

To evaluate the presence of disability leadership across the U21 Network, we examined explicit references to leadership by disabled individuals within disability-focused groups at member universities. This approach aligns with the framework established in using the new disability human rights paradigm to create higher education leadership opportunities, which emphasises the principle of '*Nothing about us, unless it is led by us*'. Our analysis categorised leadership status into 3 categories:

1. **Explicit leadership:** Groups that explicitly stated that they were led by disabled individuals were categorised as Yes. This classification required a direct acknowledgment of disability leadership within the group's public materials.
2. **Potential leadership:** Groups that did not explicitly mention disability leadership but contained indicators suggesting it could be inferred were placed in this category. This distinction is important because, while some groups may be disability-led in practice, the absence of explicit acknowledgment limits transparency, accountability, and the visibility of disabled leaders.
3. **No indication of leadership:** Groups for which there was no explicit or implicit evidence that they were led by disabled individuals were categorised as such.

By structuring our analysis in this way, we aimed to assess the extent to which the '*Nothing about us, unless it is led by us*' principle is upheld across the U21 Network. This distinction is crucial in understanding not only the presence of disability leadership but also the extent to which it is publicly recognised and institutionalised within university structures.

## Findings

32 disability groups were located:

### Explicit Leadership

6 groups were found to have explicit leadership.

Table 1. List of university groups with explicit leadership.

Group Name	Group Type	Explicit Leadership Reason
<b>University of Nottingham Disabled Students Network</b> <sup>46</sup>	Student Advocacy Group	Explicit about disability leadership in FAQs.
<b>The University of Queensland Disability Inclusion Group</b> <sup>47</sup>	Committee	Explicit requirement of up to 8 members with disabilities, with chair exclusively open to persons with disability.
<b>The University of Queensland Disability Inclusion Advocacy Network</b> <sup>48</sup>	ERG	Explicit on website with name and lived experience type of leadership.
<b>The University of Edinburgh Neurodiversity Society</b> <sup>49</sup>	Student Advocacy Group	Explicitly run by and for those with disabilities.
<b>The University of Melbourne Staff Disability Inclusion Network</b> <sup>50</sup>	ERG	Established by those with lived experience.
<b>The University of Melbourne Disabilities Department</b> <sup>51</sup>	Student Advocacy Group	Only students with disabilities are eligible for leadership.

For example, the UQ Disability Inclusion Group (UQ DIG) includes the following in their Terms of Reference (ToR):

### **Composition**

*The Disability Inclusion Group shall be composed of:*

- *Chair (senior UQ staff member with a disability)*
- *A minimum of 5 UQ staff members via EOI, who:*
  - *have a disability OR*
  - *have carer responsibilities for a person(s) with disability OR*
  - *have a strong interest in disability or are working in the disability space (maximum of 2 staff members can nominate for this category).*

Meanwhile, the University of Nottingham Disabled Students Network states: “We are run by disabled students for disabled students” (Page 1).

46 University of Nottingham Students' Union. (n.d.). *Disabled students' network*. <https://su.nottingham.ac.uk/activities/view/disabled-students>

47 The University of Queensland. (2022). *Terms of reference: UQ disability inclusion group (DIG)*. [https://staff.uq.edu.au/UQDIG\\_updatedMarch2022.pdf](https://staff.uq.edu.au/UQDIG_updatedMarch2022.pdf)

48 The University of Queensland. (n.d.). *UQ Disability Inclusion Advocacy Network (UQ DIAN)*. <https://staff.uq.edu.au/information-and-services/human-resources/diversity-and-inclusion/disability/uq-disability-inclusion-advocacy-network-uq-dian>

49 Edinburgh University Students' Association. (n.d.). *Neurodiversity society*. <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/view/euneurodiversitysoc>

50 The University of Melbourne. (n.d.). *Launch of the staff disability inclusion network*. <https://mdhs.unimelb.edu.au/diversity-and-inclusion/news-and-events/launch-of-the-staff-disability-inclusion-network>

51 The University of Melbourne Student Union. (n.d.). *Disabilities department*. <https://umsu.unimelb.edu.au/communities/disabilities/>

## Potential leadership

10 groups were possibly disability led, but not explicitly so.

Table 2. Table showing the groups that were classified with potential inclusion and the explanation.

Group Name	Group Type	Potential Leadership Reason
<b>McMaster University Disability, Inclusion, Madness, Accessibility, Neurodiversity (DIMAND) Working Group</b> <sup>52</sup>	Committee	Members have 'lived experience' but not explicit to leadership.
<b>University of Nottingham Disabled Staff Network</b> <sup>53</sup>	ERG	Members have 'lived experience' but not explicit to leadership.
<b>University of Nottingham Neurodivergent Network</b> <sup>54</sup>	ERG	Members have 'lived experience' but not explicit to leadership.
<b>The University of Sydney Disability at Work Network</b> <sup>55</sup>	ERG	No ToR or other references to disability leadership, but further investigation into the leaders implies it may be disability led.
<b>The University of Sydney Disabilities Collective</b> <sup>56</sup>	Student Union Group	Members have 'lived experience' but not explicit to leadership.
<b>The University of Queensland Disability Collective</b> <sup>57</sup>	Student Union Group	Members have 'lived experience' but not explicit to leadership.
<b>The University of Edinburgh Disabled Staff Network</b> <sup>58</sup>	ERG	Not all members need have disability and no mention of leadership requirements.
<b>The University of Edinburgh Disabled Student's Campaign</b> <sup>59</sup>	Student Union Group	Members have 'lived experience' but not explicit to leadership.
<b>University of Maryland Queers with Disabilities</b> <sup>60</sup>	Student Union Group	Membership open to all interested.
<b>The University of Auckland Disabled Staff / Staff with Disabilities Network</b> <sup>61</sup>	ERG	Members have 'lived experience' but not explicit to leadership.

The majority of groups in this category, particularly Student Advocacy Groups and ERGs, restrict membership to people with disabilities. However, they often fall short of explicitly identifying themselves as disability led. In some cases, leadership can be inferred - such as an ERG that does not state disability leadership outright but features photos of a wheelchair user as the lead in official materials. We will not name this university to protect the privacy of the individual.

While these examples strongly suggest disability leadership, the absence of explicit confirmation means they cannot be definitively categorised as such. This highlights the importance of clearly articulating disability leadership in public-facing materials to ensure transparency, representation, and trust within the community.

52 McMaster University. (n.d.). *Disability, inclusion, madness, accessibility, neurodiversity (DIMAND)*. <https://pacbic.mcmaster.ca/about-page/tab-page/>

53 University of Nottingham. (n.d.). *Staff Networks at the University of Nottingham*. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/staff-networks/index.aspx>

54 University of Nottingham. (n.d.). *Staff Networks at the University of Nottingham*. <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/staff-networks/index.aspx>

55 The University of Sydney. (n.d.). *Progress and achievements: Disability action plan*. <https://www.sydney.edu.au/about-us/vision-and-values/diversity/disability-action-plan/progress-and-achievements.html>

56 University of Sydney Students' Representative Council. (n.d.). *Disabilities collective*. <https://srcusyd.net.au/get-involved/join/disabilities/>

57 The University of Queensland Union. (n.d.). *Disability collective*. <https://uqu.com.au/uqu-collectives/disability-collective/>

58 The University of Edinburgh. (n.d.). *Disabled staff network*. <https://equality-diversity.ed.ac.uk/edi-groups/disabled-staff-network>

59 The University of Edinburgh Students' Association. (n.d.). *Disabled students campaign*. <https://www.eusa.ed.ac.uk/activities/view/DisabledStudentsCampaign>

60 Pride Alliance Maryland. (n.d.). *Welcome to the pride alliance*. <https://prideallianceumd.carrd.co/>

61 University of Auckland. (n.d.). *Disabled staff/staff with disabilities network (DSN)*. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about-us/about-the-university/equity-at-the-university/equity-information-for-staff/staff-with-disabilities-and-impairments/staff-with-disabilities-and-impairments-network.html>

## No indication of leadership

15 groups were located with no indication of disability leadership.

### McMaster University

- McMaster Accessibility Advisory Council (Committee)<sup>62</sup>
- Maccess (Student Union Group)<sup>63</sup>
- Employee Accessibility Network (ERG)<sup>64</sup>

### University of Birmingham

- Disabled Students Contribution Group (Student Union Group)<sup>65</sup>
- Enabling Staff Network<sup>66</sup>.

### The University of Sydney

- Disability Inclusion Action Plan Implementation Group (Committee)<sup>67</sup>

### University College Dublin (Ireland)

- CHAS Disability Working Group (Committee)<sup>68</sup>
- UCD Neurodiversity Group (Committee)<sup>69</sup>

### University of Connecticut

- Committee on Access and Accommodations (Committee)<sup>70</sup>

### University of Glasgow

- Disability Equality Group (Committee)<sup>71</sup>
- Disabled Students Society (Student Union Group)<sup>72</sup>

### University of Maryland

- Disability: Identity, Culture, and Education (Student Union Group)<sup>73</sup>
- Delta Alpha Pi International Honor Society (Student Union Group)<sup>74</sup>

### University of Auckland

- Disability Action Plan Reference Group (Committee)<sup>75</sup>
- Disabled Students Association (Student Union Group)<sup>76</sup>

This took a variety of forms. For example, committees like the McMaster University Accessibility Advisory Council and the University College Dublin Neurodiversity Working Group only reference consulting staff / people with disability<sup>77,78</sup>. Meanwhile, the University of Maryland student advocacy

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62 McMaster University. (n.d.). *McMaster accessibility advisory council*. Accessibility McMaster. <https://accessibility.mcmaster.ca/legislation/mcmaster-accessibility-council/>

63 McMaster University Students Union. (n.d.). *Maccess*. McMaster Students Union. <https://msumcmaster.ca/service/maccess/>

64 McMaster University. (n.d.). *Employee accessibility network*. Accessibility McMaster. <https://accessibility.mcmaster.ca/services/employee-accessibility-network/>

65 University of Birmingham. (n.d.). *Disabled students' contribution group*. <https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/student/equality-and-diversity/accessibility/disabled-students-contribution-group.aspx>

66 Provided in qualitative survey, no online source found.

67 The University of Sydney. (n.d.). *Consultation and evaluation: Disability action plan*. <https://www.sydney.edu.au/about-us/vision-and-values/diversity/disability-action-plan/consultation-and-evaluation.html>

68 University College Dublin. (n.d.). *CHAS disability working group*. <https://www.ucd.ie/chas/about/committees/equalitydiversityandinclusion/chasdisabilityworkinggroup/>

69 University College Dublin. (n.d.). *UCD neurodiversity group*. <https://www.ucd.ie/equality/groups/neurodiversitygroup/>

70 University of Connecticut. (n.d.). *Committee on access and accommodations*. <https://equity.uconn.edu/committee-on-access-and-accommodations/>

71 University of Glasgow. (n.d.). *Disability equality group*. <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/equalitydiversity/structure/groups/#disabilityequalitygroup>

72 University of Glasgow Students' Representative Council. (n.d.). *Disabled students' society*. <https://www.glasgowunisc.org/organisation/disabledstudents/>

73 DICE. (n.d.). *Disability: Identity, culture, and education*. <https://terplink.umd.edu/organization/dice>

74 Delta Alpha Pi International Honor Society. (n.d.). *Maryland*. <http://deltaalphapihonorociety.org/delta-alpha-pi-international-dapi-chapters/elementor-1642/>

75 University of Auckland. (n.d.). *Disability action plan reference group*. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about-us/about-the-university/equity-at-the-university/about-equity/a-safe--inclusive-and-equitable-university/disability-action-plan/>

76 University of Auckland. (n.d.). *Disability action plan reference group*. <https://www.auckland.ac.nz/en/about-us/about-the-university/equity-at-the-university/about-equity/a-safe--inclusive-and-equitable-university/disability-action-plan/get-involved.html#dap-reference>

77 McMaster University. (2022). *McMaster accessibility advisory council*. <https://accessibility.mcmaster.ca/legislation/mcmaster-accessibility-council/>

78 University College Dublin. (2024). *UCD neurodiversity group*. <https://www.ucd.ie/equality/groups/neurodiversitygroup/>

group is open to anyone with an interest in disability advocacy, not just with lived experience, and does not clarify if this translates to the leadership<sup>79</sup>.

## Other findings

The Tecnológico de Monterrey mentions the existence of student and staff groups working on disability but does not provide names or the nature of said groups<sup>80</sup>.

One finding of note was that the U21 member University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign did not have a dedicated disability committee, while another University of Illinois campus which is not a member of the U21 Network did.<sup>81</sup>

## Recommendations

a) **Visibility of disability leadership:** It is important for groups that represent disability interests to clearly state whether they are disability-led in their outward-facing communications, such as on their websites and promotional materials.

When assessing the visibility of disability leadership within the U21 Network, our initial approach was to classify groups using a binary 'yes' or 'no' indicator. However, we introduced a third category, 'unknown', for groups that suggest disability leadership but provide no explicit confirmation. While we assume that many of these groups are indeed disability-led, we recommend that they clearly state this in their outward-facing communications, such as on their websites and promotional materials. There are several key reasons why this is beneficial:

- **Increased confidence and engagement:** Anecdotally indicated that individuals with disabilities are more likely to feel comfortable and empowered in groups that are explicitly disability-led. Clearly communicating this leadership structure can encourage greater participation and trust within the disability community.
- **Improved visibility and representation:** Representation matters and highlighting disability leadership can create clear role models and pathways for students and staff with disabilities. This visibility not only fosters a sense of belonging but also demonstrates institutional commitment to meaningful inclusion.
- **Inclusive language for leadership disclosure:** We acknowledge that not all individuals may feel comfortable publicly disclosing their disability status, often due to concerns about stigma or discrimination. Institutions can navigate this by adopting language that signals disability leadership without requiring personal disclosure. Both explicit leadership examples provided in the findings achieve this without naming or connecting to individuals. This phrasing effectively communicates disability leadership while respecting personal privacy.

By adopting these practices, universities can reinforce their commitment to disability inclusion and ensure that leadership by individuals with disabilities is both recognised and valued within their communities.

b) **Develop disability led groups:** Further attention should also be given to encouraging the establishment of new disability-led groups within universities that currently lack them.

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79 DICE. (n.d.). *Disability: Identity, culture, and education*. <https://terplink.umd.edu/organization/dice>

80 University of Monterrey. (2018). *Diversity & inclusion*. <https://tec.mx/2020-06/>; Tecnológico de Monterrey. (n.d.). *Los Espacios de Escucha que Buscan Mayor Representatividad en el Tec*. <https://tec.mx/es/noticias/nacional/institucion/los-espacios-de-escucha-que-buscan-mayor-representatividad-en-el-tec>

81 University of Illinois Chicago. (n.d.). *Chancellor's committee on the status of persons with disabilities*. <https://ccspd.uic.edu/>

While a significant number of such groups exist across the U21 Network, some institutions still do not appear to have their own dedicated disability inclusion committees, ERGs, or student advocacy bodies.

- c) **Knowledge sharing:** To support the formation of new groups, universities could facilitate knowledge-sharing opportunities between institutions with well-established disability networks and those seeking to develop their own.

Knowledge sharing could include mentorship programs, collaborative workshops, or structured information exchanges that allow emerging groups to learn from best practices and challenges faced by their counterparts. To enhance knowledge exchange, a U21 resource folder for best practices seems to be a simple solution to share information and information on how to set up student / staff advocacy groups.

By fostering these connections, universities can strengthen disability leadership across the network and ensure that staff and students with disabilities have access to structured representation, advocacy, and community support.

## Conclusion

The analysis of disability leadership within the U21 Network reveals significant strides towards inclusive practices yet highlights areas for further development. The principle of *'Nothing about us, unless it is led by us'* is increasingly being adopted, with several institutions demonstrating explicit disability leadership. However, many groups still lack clear acknowledgment of such leadership, which is crucial for transparency, accountability, and fostering trust within the disability community.

## Chapter 1.5.

### Disability and Intersectionality

Brooke Szucs, Paul Harpur, Dino Willox, and Nancy Pachana

#### Introduction

The U21 Network comprises 30 member institutions from a diverse range of countries and regions, striving to ensure that more diverse students are encouraged to engage with the network. To achieve this, U21 actively works to remove barriers to participation and promote increased access to opportunities for more students. In alignment with this commitment, U21 aims to enhance inclusivity for groups identified as underrepresented within higher education institutions across its member regions.

As part of these efforts, the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Working Group was established to proactively foster inclusivity through various initiatives, including online programs and global mobility grants. As well as its relation to research, such as how and why certain areas are researched and how EDI is included in these initiatives. This commitment to advancing EDI has been recognised internationally, with U21 receiving a Highly Commended award at the PIEoneer Awards for its contributions to championing diversity and inclusion in higher education<sup>82</sup>.

The specific groups engaged with under the framework of EDI vary across countries, reflecting the diverse social, cultural, and institutional contexts in which U21 operates<sup>83</sup>. While a broad range of diversity groups is considered, they are often addressed as separate categories rather than in an intersectional manner. This approach overlooks how individuals who embody multiple marginalised identities may experience unique and compounded challenges at the intersection and overlap of these identities.

Intersectionality refers to the concept that individuals who hold multiple marginalised identities experience a cumulative and unique combination of these characteristics. For example, the experience of a white gay man differs from those of an Indigenous gay man, or a lesbian woman, as factors such as sexuality interact with gender and race in distinct ways.

In the context of U21's EDI efforts, the recognition of and response to intersectionality by member universities is crucial. For instance, queer disabled students may face additional barriers accessing LGBTIAQ+ student spaces due to a lack of physical accessibility. Similarly, Indigenous staff with disabilities may find that existing disability support services do not adequately address their cultural needs, creating further exclusion. Research into dementia may fail to take into consideration the lived experience of trans or gender diverse people, resulting in incomplete outcomes or recommendations. Addressing these intersecting challenges requires a more nuanced and inclusive approach to EDI initiatives.

Building on U21's active initiatives to enhance access for marginalised groups, this chapter examines how member universities address intersectionality in their engagement with staff, students, and community members with disabilities.

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82 Universitas21. (2024). *U21 and common purpose success at the PIEoneer awards 2024!* <https://universitas21.com/news/u21-and-common-purpose-success-at-the-pioneer-awards-2024/>

83 Universitas 21. (n.d.). *Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI)*. <https://universitas21.com/collaborative-areas/edi/>

This analysis was conducted using 2 desktop research methods:

1. A review of all policy and strategic documents related to the inclusion of community members with disabilities.
2. An examination of member university websites to assess the extent to which intersectionality is incorporated into their online presence.

Based on the findings, this chapter evaluates and highlights successful implementations of intersectional practices within U21 members' policies and strategies, with a particular focus on disability inclusion within broader EDI frameworks. The goal is to identify best practices and provide actionable recommendations for their adaptation and dissemination across the U21 Network. By doing so, this chapter aims to support member universities in benchmarking their efforts and collaboratively advancing intersectional approaches to inclusion.

## Methodology

This chapter employs 2 desktop analysis methods to examine the implementation of intersectional considerations across the U21 Network as they relate to disability. A systematic search was conducted to identify explicit mentions of intersectionality within institutional policies, assessing how intersectional factors—such as age, gender, race, and other dimensions—are incorporated into disability policies to address overlapping needs and barriers.

### 1. Structured Policy Review Methodology

Following the primary methodology of this study (see Methodology), we conducted a structured review of officially adopted policies and strategies, with a particular focus on Disability Action Plans (DAPs) and equivalent frameworks across the network. This approach enabled us to analyse how intersectionality is conceptualised and applied at the strategic and policy levels to support the university community, as outlined by Harpur et al<sup>84</sup>. By examining these documents, we aimed to evaluate the extent to which intersectional considerations are embedded in disability-related policies and identify areas for improvement.

To assess the visibility of intersectionality within disability inclusion efforts, we conducted a systematic website search across participating U21 member institutions. This involved 2 search methods:

1. **Internal search:** University website search functions were used to identify explicit mentions of intersectionality within institutional webpages, policies, and public statements.
2. **External search:** A Google search was conducted using the university's name along with the term "intersectionality" to capture any relevant content that might not have appeared in internal searches.

Both searches focused on explicit references to intersectionality and related terms<sup>85</sup>, to determine how disability inclusion intersects with other marginalised identities. When no terms were found through the search function, likely areas to provide results were manually searched.

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84 Harpur, P., Szucs, B., & Willox, D. (2023). Strategic and policy responses to intersectionality in higher education. *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management*, 45(1), 19-35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1360080X.2022.2144790>

85 LGBTQIA+, LGBT, Indigenous, First Nations, carers, diversity, equity, inclusion, women, gender, and sex.

## Research Questions

Our analysis was guided by the following key questions:

- **Is intersectionality considered, and how is it included?**
- **Does intersectionality appear explicitly, or is it embedded through the inclusion of other marginalised groups in disability-related initiatives?**
- **Which groups are considered in intersectional approaches to disability?**
- **Are any key marginalised groups missing from the discussion?**

## Data Categorisation and Analysis

To assess the extent and depth of intersectionality within disability-related policies and public communications, mentions and inferences of intersectionality were catalogued and classified into 3 categories:

1. **Meaningful enactment:** Intersectionality is substantively engaged with and integrated into actionable measures. Examples include:
  - a. Policies available in multiple languages for international students with disabilities.
  - b. Cross-departmental collaboration between disability services and other equity groups to implement joint initiatives.
2. **Purposeful mention:** Intersectionality is explicitly acknowledged with a strong commitment statement or emphasis, but without corresponding action items or policy measures.
3. **Course Content:** Some instances of disability and intersectionality were identified as part of university course content. These were categorised separately, as their primary purpose was academic instruction rather than institutional policy or strategic initiatives.

This classification framework allowed us to evaluate how deeply intersectional considerations are embedded within U21 institutions' disability inclusion efforts and to identify areas for improvement.

## Results

### Policy

Of the strategies and plans provided (see Methodology) we discovered the following, which included intersectional considerations:

*Table 1. This table shows the names of the plans at all universities with intersectionality included, as well as the ranking of how well this was integrated.*

University Member	Plan Name	Intersectionality Type	Intersections
<b>The University of Auckland</b>	Waipapa Taumata Rau The University of Auckland Disability Action Plan 2022-2025	Meaningfully enacted.	Māori (Indigenous).
<b>McMaster University</b>	Accessibility Policy	Purposeful mention.	Not applicable.
<b>University of Birmingham</b>	Equality Diversity and Inclusion Scheme 2021-24	Purposeful mention.	Age, disability, gender identity, experiences of being a parent or carer, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.
<b>The University of Queensland</b>	Champions of Change Disability Inclusion Research and Innovation Plan 2024-2026	Meaningfully enacted.	Language diversity, gender, religion, ethnic or other status.

University Member	Plan Name	Intersectionality Type	Intersections
The University of Queensland	Disability Action Plan 2023–2025	Meaningfully enacted	People with disabilities who also belong to other marginalised and / or under-represented groups, such as those who have a disability and identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and LGBTQIA+.

### Meaningful Enaction

Four meaningful instances of enaction were identified in the strategic plans of the University of Birmingham, and the University of Auckland, as outlined in Table 1. For example:

#### THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND

Two strategic priorities and the DAP

*“Our ambitions for disabled learner success align with Taumata Teitei: The University of Auckland Vision 2030 and Strategic Plan 2025. Taumata Teitei articulates our commitment to te ao Māori principles, our Vision, and our Values.*

*We are guided by principles of manaakitanga, whanaungatanga, and kaitiakitanga...”*

Waipapa Taumata Rau, The University of Auckland Disability Action Plan 2022–2025, Page 7.

#### UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Support intersectional initiatives that promote equity, diversity, and inclusion.	Work collaboratively with colleagues across the university to promote intersectional approaches to equity, diversity and inclusion across the research enterprise.	Deputy Provost	Q4 2024
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Figure 1. This image presents an intersectional Key Performance Indicator (KPI) from Disability Inclusion Research and Innovation Plan (2024–2026, p. 11), University of Birmingham.

Another example of meaningful enaction can be seen in Figure 1, as this KPI explicitly assigns responsibility to a senior executive, demonstrating institutional accountability in embedding intersectional considerations into disability inclusion strategies.

These examples illustrate how principles of intersectionality are actively incorporated into outcomes, KPIs, and key strategic considerations across institutional planning. By analysing these best practices, we can identify successful approaches that U21 members may adopt to enhance their own intersectional frameworks.

### Purposeful Mention

We found 2 instances of purposeful mentions, at the University of Birmingham and McMaster University (see Table 1).

To illustrate, the University of Birmingham Equality Diversity and Inclusion Scheme 2021–24 (page 8) included the following values statement:

*“Many intersecting factors shape the individual identities and experiences of our University community. This includes age, disability, gender identity, experiences of being a parent or carer, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. We recognise, however, that diversity does not in itself guarantee equity or inclusion. As an institution, we need to be proactive in celebrating and harnessing our diversity...”*

While this is a strong statement that shows a clear commitment to the value of intersectionality, this is not reflected in the action items or other key areas throughout the

document. It also does not further examine the intersections mentioned. As such, it is classed as a purposeful mention.

No other mentions, explicit or implicit, were located.

### Intersecting Identities

Our third research question asked which groups were listed as intersecting with disability, so mentions of other marginalised areas were collected. Within the strategies, the intersecting groups<sup>86</sup> identified through this process were:

<b>Indigenous</b>	1 mention
<b>Age</b>	2 mentions
<b>Sex</b>	2 mentions
<b>Carer status</b>	1 mention
<b>Culturally and Racially Marginalised (CARM)</b>	4 mentions
<b>Religious affiliation</b>	2 mentions
<b>LGBTIAQ+ status</b>	2 mentions
<b>Care leaver status</b>	1 mention
<b>Language diversity</b>	2 mentions
<b>Regional</b>	1 mention
<b>Low socio-economic status</b>	1 mention

### General Search

This section shows the results of the search for intersectionality outside of strategic plans. Namely, websites and other documents, for a view of how the intersection of disability and other areas are included outside of the strategic priorities. Our search yielded the following:

Table 2. This table shows the universities who included intersectionality in their non-strategic materials, such as websites and the qualitative responses.

University Member	Item Name	Intersectionality Type	Intersections
<b>The University of Melbourne</b>	CRE-DH Impact Evaluation Report 2016 – 2022	Purposeful mention.	“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those with psychosocial disability, and people experiencing housing and financial insecurity;” p.7.
<b>The University of New South Wales</b>	Building effective system-wide disability research capacity in Australia	Purposeful mention.	Gender, race, diversity.
<b>University College Dublin</b>	UCD Widening Participation Committee Annual Report 2020/21	Meaningful enactment.	Low income, Disability, Mature, Part-time, QQI-FET [Quality and Qualifications Ireland – Further Education and Training], Sanctuary.
<b>University College Dublin</b>	Making UCD a Neurodiversity Friendly Campus	Meaningful enactment.	Neurodiversity, gender, race and socio-economic status.
<b>University College Dublin</b>	MSc in Disability	Course content.	Not applicable.
<b>KU Leuven</b>	Diversity and Intersectionality	Course content.	Gender & sexuality, race & ethnicity, class, ableism.
<b>University of Glasgow</b>	The Disabling Society SOCIO5031	Course content.	Not applicable.

### Meaningful Enaction

There were 2 instances of meaningful enaction at University College Dublin. For example:

<sup>86</sup> Terms used and groups considered marginalised change from context to context, so have been consolidated under these broad terms by the research team.

*“Optimal outcomes can only be achieved with standardised, feasible, and costed interventions demonstrated to achieve efficacy across the full range of intersectional considerations in higher education settings globally. There is an immediate need to prioritise this research focus.”*

*Making UCD a Neurodiversity Friendly Campus Report, page 30.<sup>87</sup>*

This example showed a thorough understanding of the different groups intersecting with a specific disability and what this means for those individuals. This statement is followed by practical responses to this knowledge and further investigation of the intersections.

Another showed that intersectionality was clearly included in the research design and data was properly collected:

*“While universal measures were identified as helpful, they were deemed insufficient in addressing all individual needs with a clear requirement for augmented supports and strategies identified. In addition, the amplified challenges caused by intersectional disadvantage such as neurodiversity, gender, race and socio-economic status was emphasised.”*

*Making UCD a Neurodiversity Friendly Campus, page 95.<sup>88</sup>*

### **Purposeful Mention**

There were 2 instances of a purposeful mention at the University of New South Wales and The University of Melbourne. For example:

*“All service systems have failed to respond to people experiencing intersecting disadvantage such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, those with psychosocial disability, and people experiencing housing and financial insecurity. The service systems must find ways to respond better to the most disadvantaged people with disability; otherwise, they risk permanently entrenching inequities in health and other outcomes between people with disability who are extremely disadvantaged and other Australians.”*

*The University of Melbourne, CRE-DH Impact Evaluation Report 2016 – 2022, page 7.*

This acknowledged a gap and need for support, and implied planned future engagement in this area, but no further analysis or information was provided on next steps or inclusion. In addition, 2 courses focusing on disability with an intersectionality lens were found.

1. University College Dublin Master of Science in Disability and University of Glasgow ‘The Disabling Society’ course both mentioned understanding of the intersection of disability and other marginalisations were intended learning outcomes.
2. KU Leuven in Belgium then offers the ‘Diversity and Intersectionality’ course, which explicitly includes, “Discussing its entanglement with, among others, concepts of gender & sexuality, race & ethnicity, class, ableism”. Showing that disability and intersectionality are clearly a focus of this course.

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<sup>87</sup> University College Dublin. (2025). Making UCD a neurodiversity friendly campus report. UCD Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. <https://www.ucd.ie/equality/support/neurodiversity/report/>

<sup>88</sup> University College Dublin. (2025). Making UCD a neurodiversity friendly campus report. UCD Equality, Diversity and Inclusion. <https://www.ucd.ie/equality/support/neurodiversity/report/>

The general search revealed some variation in how different groups intersected with disability:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (AUS)	1
Age	1
Sex	3
Culturally and racially marginalised	4
LGBTIAQ+	1
Low socio-economic status	1
Part-time	1
Sanctuary / Asylum	1
Alternative entry	1

Please note, member universities may have other areas where they include intersectionality; however, this project is only interested in those pertaining to the intersection of disability with other marginalisations.

For example, the Tecnológico de Monterrey Diversity and Inclusion Report<sup>89</sup> page 48 displays the following:

Figure 1. This image from the report shows a meaningful enactment through an event held to focus on the intersectional anti-racist and feminist struggle of women of colour in Mexico and Spain.



Figure 2. Re-tracing the identity of Mexican women

With the goal of talking about the *intersectionality* of race and gender in Hispanic and Mexican communities in the country, the He-ForShe student group at the San Luis Potosí Campus organized this conversation, which was attended by about 50 people, including students from Tec de Monterrey and other universities. The focus was on the anti-racist and feminist struggle of women of color in Mexico and Spain. The topics addressed were:

- Anti-racism in the feminist movement in Mexico
- The Afro-Mexican woman
- The Indigenous woman
- The Asian-Hispanic Woman
- Diverse Mexicanity, alliance, and sisterhood.

Examples like this were not included in the analysis due to not connecting with disability, but worth mentioning they do exist, and it is worth celebrating as well as further investigation.

### Discussion

Our findings show that intersectionality is beginning to be recognised and enacted by the members of the network, though there are some areas for attention and growth if we wish to create more equitable universities.

### Limited Consideration of Intersectionality

The findings indicate a low number of explicit mentions and meaningful enactments of intersectionality within disability policies and strategies across U21 member institutions. This is a concern, as intersectionality is crucial in addressing the compounded disadvantages faced by individuals who belong to multiple marginalised groups. By neglecting these intersections, policies risk being ineffective or even exclusionary, ultimately failing to serve diverse disability communities adequately.

### Which Groups Are (and Aren't) Included?

A key observation is the type of representation of intersectional considerations across different identity groups. While some institutions acknowledge the need for intersectionality in disability inclusion, the groups considered vary widely due to the cultural, historical, and colonial contexts.

89 Tecnológico de Monterrey. (2023). *Reporte de diversidad, equidad, inclusión y pertenencia 2022-2023*. <https://tec.mx/reporte-diversidad-inclusion-2022-2023.pdf>

One surprising finding is the lack of intersectionality with Indigenous and First Nations communities. This is particularly concerning given global trends indicating that Indigenous populations are more likely to experience disability than the general population<sup>90,91</sup>. However, cultural sensitivities and differing traditional understandings of disability can make mainstream disability services ineffective or culturally unsafe<sup>92</sup>. Without targeted efforts to address these challenges via decolonisation systems, Indigenous individuals with disabilities may remain underserved by institutional support systems.

Another major intersection that is underrepresented is the LGBTIAQ+ community, with only 3 references across the institutions analysed. Individuals with disabilities in these communities face significant challenges, such as intersectional microaggressions<sup>93</sup>, yet this issue is largely overlooked in institutional priorities.

Additionally, age-based intersectionality is not centred, despite the well-documented ways in which disability prevalence and experiences shift across different life stages. The absence of this perspective suggests an area for further development.

### Geographic and Institutional Trends

The institutions that actively engage with intersectionality tend to be in Western countries i.e. Australia, New Zealand, Ireland, UK, Belgium, and Canada, which may be attributed to broader social and cultural movements prioritising DEI and broader colonial attitudes. Additionally, universities that demonstrate higher levels of intersectional engagement are often involved in external diversity initiatives, such as:

- Athena SWAN (Scientific Women's Academic Network) a gender equity program or related programs – Member universities: The University of Melbourne, The University of New South Wales<sup>94</sup>, The University of Glasgow, The University of Birmingham<sup>95</sup>, University College Dublin<sup>96</sup>, and McMaster University.<sup>97</sup> (Please note, these are all but one of the universities included in this chapter)
- Age-Friendly University Global Network – Member universities: University College Dublin, McMaster University.<sup>98</sup>

This suggests that participation in structured equity programs may encourage or facilitate intersectional approaches within disability inclusion policies. Especially as Athena SWAN's program

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90 Harpur, P., & Stein, M. A. (2018). Indigenous persons with disabilities and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities: An identity without a home? *International Human Rights Law Review*, 7(2), 165-200. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22131035-00702002>

91 Daniels-Mayes, S., Harpur, P., & Ashley, M. (2023). Are Indigenous people with disability. In S. Robinson & K. R. Fisher (Eds.), *Research handbook on disability policy* (p. 402). Edward Elgar Publishing.

92 Daniels-Mayes, S., Harpur, P., & Stein, M. A. (2023). Strategic human rights-based policy reforms for making Australian universities equally accessible to students, staff, and faculty who are Indigenous people with disability. In S. Robinson & K. R. Fisher (Eds.), *Research handbook on disability policy* (pp. 402-417). Edward Elgar Publishing.

93 Miller, R. A., & Smith, A. C. (2020). Microaggressions experienced by LGBTQ students with disabilities. *Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice*, 58(5), 491-506. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19496591.2020.1835669>

94 SAGE. (2024a). *SAGE subscribers and Athena Swan awardees*. <https://sciencegenderequity.org.au/sage-accreditation-and-awards/sage-subscribers-and-athena-sw-an-awardees/>

95 AdvanceHE. (n.d.). *Athena Swan charter members*. <https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/equality-charters/athena-sw-an-charter/members>

96 University College Dublin. (2024). *UCD awarded Athena Swan institutional silver award*. <https://www.ucd.ie/newsandopinion/2024/september/ucdawarddathenaswaninstitutionalsilveraward/>

97 McMaster University. (2019). *Increasing equity, diversity and inclusion in research*. <https://science.mcmaster.ca/increasing-equity-diversity-and-inclusion-in-research/>

98 Age Friendly Universities. (n.d.). *Members*. <https://www.afugn.org/afugn-members>

guide explicitly calls for intersectional approaches as a main principle and provides details on how to meaningfully enact this concept.<sup>99</sup>

However, we will note that both age and gender were not the most represented areas for intersectionality, so there is also room for the participating groups to lean further into the guidance of these programs.

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<sup>99</sup> SAFE. (2024b). *New and improved intersectionality guidance*. <https://sciencegenderequity.org.au/resources/blog/intersectionality-in-sage-athena-swan/>

## Recommendations

For U21 member universities seeking to improve their intersectional approaches to disability inclusion, the following strategies are recommended:

- a) **Leverage existing diversity programs:** Leverage existing diversity programs (e.g. Athena SWAN, Age-Friendly Universities) to establish structured, intersectional frameworks that ensure coordinated responses across marginalised groups. Members can consider if joining is right for their needs.
- b) **Indigenous and First Nations perspectives:** Incorporate Indigenous and First Nations perspectives by engaging with Indigenous leaders, scholars, and disability advocates to develop culturally appropriate policies and services that use decolonisation strategies to reframe and reassess language, assumptions, ways of being, doing, and knowing.
- c) **LGBTIQ+:** Strengthen LGBTIQ+ inclusion within disability strategies by ensuring accessibility of queer spaces, recognising the unique challenges faced by disabled LGBTIQ+ individuals and fostering collaborations between disability and queer student organisations and units.
- d) **Age conscious:** Apply an age-conscious framework to disability policies by considering how disability needs change across life stages and integrating insights from initiatives like the Age-Friendly University program.
- e) **Benchmarking:** Develop formal benchmarks for intersectionality within institutional disability policies, ensuring that intersectional perspectives are embedded in strategic plans, KPIs, and institutional commitments.

By adopting these recommendations, U21 member universities can move beyond isolated acknowledgments of intersectionality and implement more meaningful, systemic changes that benefit diverse disability communities.

## Conclusion

This chapter has highlighted the importance of incorporating intersectionality into disability inclusion efforts within the U21 Network. By examining the policies and practices of member universities, it is evident that while some institutions are making meaningful strides, there is still significant room for improvement. The analysis reveals that intersectionality is often acknowledged but not always substantively enacted, leading to gaps in addressing the compounded disadvantages faced by individuals with multiple marginalised identities.

To create more equitable and inclusive environments, universities must move beyond isolated acknowledgments and integrate intersectional perspectives into their strategic plans, policies, and practices. This includes engaging with Indigenous and First Nations communities, strengthening LGBTIQ+ inclusion, and applying age-conscious frameworks. Leveraging existing diversity programs and developing formal benchmarks for intersectionality can further support these efforts.

By adopting these recommendations, universities generally can enhance their disability inclusion strategies, ensuring that all individuals, regardless of their intersecting identities, have equitable access to opportunities and support. This commitment to intersectionality will not only benefit diverse disability communities but also contribute to the overall advancement of equity, diversity, and inclusion within higher education.



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