

UNE Accessibility Action Plan

June 2020 – June 2021

Acknowledgement of Country

The University of New England respects and acknowledges that its people, programs and facilities are built on land, and surrounded by a sense of belonging, both ancient and contemporary, of the world's oldest living culture. In doing so, UNE values and respects Indigenous knowledge systems as a vital part of the knowledge capital of Australia.

Introduction

The *UNE Accessibility Action Plan 2020-2021 (AAP)* will serve as an *Accessibility Action Plan*. The University has an ongoing commitment to its staff, students and visitors via the provision of strategies for improving its physical/virtual environments and business practices. While actively amending practice perceived to discriminate against individuals with a disability, the AAP is intended to guide the development of a range of facilities, services and products “to be accessible to the greatest extent possible by people of all ages and abilities”¹.

Recent Australian-based articles and reports^{2,3} highlighted the need for more transparent communication and a more inclusive and equitable university experience to improve staff and student on-boarding, retention and success. This AAP also responds to those issues, demonstrating the University's commitment to encourage diversity and meet the needs of its community, irrespective of an individual's location, cultural, social or economic background, age, religious belief or sexual orientation.

This AAP aims to uphold UNE's reputation as a university of choice for the wider community in its capacity as an employer, as an inclusive learning and research environment for students and staff, and as an organisation compliant with Commonwealth government accessibility-related requirements. The purpose of the AAP is to support the University's desire to increase participation and diversity and to apply the principles of **Universal Design** to its activities⁴, including the review and further development of:

- Course content and delivery;
- Physical environment and space;
- Technological environments and their associated infrastructure; and
- Guidelines, manuals and other policy-related material providing instruction about the organisational programs and initiatives.

¹ Story, M.F., Mueller, J.L., and Mace, R.L. (1998). *The universal design file: Designing for people of all ages and abilities*. North Carolina State University: Raleigh NC (<https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED460554>)

² Final Report - Improving retention, completion and success in higher education. 2017

³ Norton, A., Cherastidham, I., and Mackey, W. (2018). *Dropping out: the benefits and costs of trying university*. Grattan Institute.

⁴ Burgstahler, S. (2009). *Universal Design in Education: Principles and Applications*. University of Washington: Seattle WA (<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED506545.pdf>)

Process to Develop the AAP

The Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Section 61) requires AAPs to include the following components:

1. A review of current activities to identify any potentially discriminatory practices;
2. Establishment of specific goals and targets (with timeframes) to ameliorate those practices;
3. Development of strategies and programs designed to meet those goals;
4. Development of monitoring and evaluation strategies to monitor and report on progress made towards successful program/goal completion;
5. Allocation of responsibility for each target; and
6. Development of a communication strategy to improve awareness and successfully implement accessibility initiatives.

Progress since the development of the 2014 – 2017 Disability Action Plan (DAP)

The following key achievements have been incorporated since the development of the 2014 – 2017 DAP:

1. The establishment of UNE *Diversity Advisory Committee*⁵, aims to assist in creating an environment characterised by equal access and respected participation of all groups and individuals regardless of abilities and disabilities, or cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, age, religious or sexual orientation. The current chair of the Committee is the UNE Chief Operating Officer.
2. An increase in the number of UNE student registrations with the *Student Access & Inclusion*, requesting reasonable study adjustments and support for identified health conditions. This increase also demonstrates an improved awareness of the service offered by *Student Access & Inclusion* and anecdotally, a level of comfort on the part of students to engage with the office and subsequently to disclose a health condition.
3. The regular offering of Staff Disability Awareness Training as a core program at UNE throughout the year, provided in multiple modes of delivery to all staff and featured in the UNE staff training calendar.
4. Increased support for improved and more varied training options relating to staff mental health programs.
5. The trial of a peer-mentoring program for students with Autism Spectrum Disorder, funded via the *Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP)*.

Improved UNE website compliance with current Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). Initiatives are also planned to improve accessibility to material contained within UNE's Learning Management Systems, in accordance with the WCAG.

The establishment of the UNE Student Access & Inclusion Contact Network which has greatly improved collaboration between the *Student Access & Inclusion* and the Academic Schools.

The delivery of the UNE Campus Masterplan, compliant with relevant accessibility and building codes.

⁵ *Terms of Reference (Vice-Chancellor Approved) – Diversity Advisory Committee*
(<https://policies.une.edu.au/document/view-current.php?id=389>)

Consultation

Key stakeholders participated in an information session about the AAP before being invited to comment on the draft document and the AAP was endorsed by the Diversity Advisory committee. The final version of the AAP was published and made publicly available on 29 June 2020, before being lodged and subsequently registered with the Australian Human Rights Commission.

Key Objective: Incorporation of Universal Design Principles

Universal Design Principles^{6,7} aim to guide the development and design of environments, products, communications, programs, tools and services that respect and promote the inclusion of all people, regardless of their background, abilities or preferences.

The eight Goals of Universal Design are listed below.^{8,9}

Universal Design Principles	
Equitable Use The design is useful and marketable to people with diverse abilities.	Tolerance for Error The design minimizes hazards and the adverse consequences of accidental or unintended actions.
Flexibility in Use The design accommodates a wide range of individual preferences and abilities.	Low Physical Effort The design can be used efficiently and comfortably and with a minimum of fatigue.
Simple and Intuitive Use Use of the design is easy to understand, regardless of the user's experience, knowledge, language skills, or current concentration level.	Size and Space for Approach and Use Appropriate size and space are provided for approach, reach, manipulation, and use regardless of user's body size, posture, or mobility.
Perceptible Information The design communicates necessary information effectively to the user, regardless of ambient conditions or the user's sensory abilities.	Cultural Appropriateness Respecting and reinforcing cultural values, and the social and environmental contexts of any design project.

⁶ The Centre for Universal Design (1997). The Principles of Universal Design, Version 2.0. Raleigh, NC: North Carolina State University

⁷ See <http://universaldesignaustralia.net.au/2016/04/8-goals-of-universal-design/>.

⁸ A list of the key elements that should be present in a design which adheres to the principle. (Note: all guidelines may not be relevant to all designs.).

⁹ Number 8 of the Goals of Universal Design by Steinfeld and Maisel, 2012: <http://udeworld.com/goalsofud.html>.

In accordance with these goals, UNE is committed to:

- Incorporating the goals of Universal Design into key University functions;
- Increasing staff awareness of the goals of Universal Design; and
- Investing in research that improves understanding and capability to deliver on Universal Design.

University of New England Strategic Priorities

UNE has been a leading innovator of flexible study in Australia for over 60 years and continues its commitment to develop individual aspirations, potential and capability, and to enhance the future of its communities through quality research, fostering innovation and delivery of a formative educational experience. As a regional university with global reach, UNE aims to connect with its students for life, building enduring partnerships with industry, professions, business and government worldwide. This has led to the development of six strategic priorities for UNE, outlined in its Strategic Plan (and included below).

UNE Strategic Priorities 2016-2020
DELIVER EXCELLENT RESEARCH WITH HIGH IMPACT: Achieve distinction in research to positively impact our community
DELIVER AN OUTSTANDING STUDENT EXPERIENCE: Provide a quality education that enhances our student's lives to enable them to excel
DIVERSIFY AND GROW INCOME: Diversify funding to guarantee excellence in all university areas
DIGITAL DOMINANCE: Lead globally in innovative online accessible learning
IMPROVE OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE: Adopt best practice to improve reliability and service
CREATE A BOLD AND INNOVATIVE CULTURE: Foster a thriving culture for creativity and innovation

These priorities are UNE's foundation for the development of strategies to develop an inclusive environment for all staff and students, including those with differing learning needs, which in turn leads to improved staff and student retention and satisfaction. Furthermore, strategies to improve inclusivity and accessibility demonstrate UNE commitment to provide a flexible, supportive and innovative learning and working environment that maximises access and participation for all staff and students.

The AAP also aligns with UNE *Framework for Enhancing Mental Health and Wellbeing* and aims to improve student engagement, assessment and study options, as well as facilitate student involvement in activities and programs to raise students' awareness of mental health issues and the academic benefits of mental wellbeing. The AAP also aligns with the UNE Reconciliation Plan 2020-2021, with a shared aim to increase the number of students participating in and successfully completing studies within the inclusive environment offered by UNE.

An increase in the number of students successfully completing their studies within the inclusive environment offered by UNE, increases incoming organisational revenue, while continuing to build on the University's reputation for overall student experience.

The AAP is a one-year document (2020-2021) that is dedicated to making continuous advancement toward engaging practices of equality for all members of our community and our greater communities. As an open document we encourage the plan's continuous improvement through collaborative input by students and staff with lived experience and stakeholders who will assist in the delivery of positive change and growth. The AAP document underpins our responsibility to create an inclusive learning and working environment for all students, staff and stakeholders living with a disability or caring for someone living with a disability within our community.

OBJECTIVE/DELIVERABLE	MEASUREMENT	ACCOUNTABILITY	TIMELINE
DELIVER EXCELLENT RESEARCH WITH HIGH IMPACT			
1. Invest in research into the needs of regional and remote students with disabilities and from other diversity groups.		Director, Strategic Research Initiatives	<i>June 2021</i>
2. Invest in research into unique applications of the principles of universal design in regional and remote Australia . This may be in specific areas, such as education and health as well as the general environment, such as Council areas and employment.		Director, Strategic Research Initiatives	<i>June 2021</i>
DELIVER AN OUTSTANDING STUDENT EXPERIENCE			
3. Establish Student Access & Inclusion Office (SA&I) that will directly manage initiatives that continually recognise cultural responsiveness, diversity, inclusion and accessibility to all students and to encourage students from backgrounds traditionally under-represented in higher education. This is extended to include any student who may formally disclose a personal inequity or may be a Carer (see <i>UNE Mental Health Strategy, Action Area 2</i>).		Director, Student Success Manager, SA&I Manager, Student Financial Support	<i>June 2021</i>
4. Promotion of scholarships, prizes, awards for specific student cohorts. To support strong leaders with disabilities and psychosocial needs to become involved and represented in decision making processes that affect them, "Nothing about us without us". Charlton, James I (1998). Nothing About Us Without Us. University of California Press.	Collaboration with UNE Student Financial Support and School of Business to develop two annual post graduate scholarships awarded to a student registered with Student Access and Inclusion: Graduate Certificate in NDIS Business Development and Graduate Diploma in Disability - relevant to NDIS.	SA&I Student Financial Support	<i>June 2021</i>

OBJECTIVE/DELIVERABLE	MEASUREMENT	ACCOUNTABILITY	TIMELINE
DELIVER AN OUTSTANDING STUDENT EXPERIENCE			
5. Regular events throughout the year that celebrate the diversity of UNE and the Armidale community. Collaboration with people with lived experience, Vision Australia, SPELD and community stakeholders to help develop biannual workshops to educate students and staff.	Continue to grow the success of our first workshop, held with Vision Australia. To actively engage with and survey students so as to address their specific needs and tailor biannual symposiums accordingly. To actively seek out and introduce additional stakeholders and strong leaders with lived experience.	SA&I	<i>June 2021</i>
6. Collaboration with community stakeholders such as Vision Australia, the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) and the Disability Employment Services (DES) to create a repository of online webinar educational modules to educate staff assisting a student registered with Access and Inclusion and/or provide resources for staff who may require information and support within the workplace.	Create a repository of accessible resources and webinars to develop a contemporary understanding of inclusion accessibility and equality and to give people the skills and confidence to protect their rights and to actively participate in and contribute to the community.	SA&I Human Resource Services (HRS)	<i>June 2021</i>
7. Publication and promotion of UNE's Inclusive Language Guide .	Continue promotion and publication.	SA&I Head Access, Inclusion and Wellbeing (AI&W)	<i>June 2021</i>
8. Membership of the Ally Network and other activities to support the inclusion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexuality plus (LGBTQIA+) students.	Membership of Ally Steering Committee has been obtained and we will continue to collaborate with the Ally Network.	SA&I UNE Life	<i>June 2021</i>

OBJECTIVE/DELIVERABLE	MEASUREMENT	ACCOUNTABILITY	TIMELINE
DELIVER AN OUTSTANDING STUDENT EXPERIENCE			
<p>9. Establish safe/inclusive and quiet spaces for various student cohorts and equity groups.</p>	<p>Collaborate with the Ally Steering Committee, Diversity Advisory Committee and the Health & Wellbeing Reference Group to establish spaces that students can come together to actively personify accessibility and inclusion.</p>	<p>SA&I UNE Life</p>	<p><i>June 2021</i></p>
<p>10. Universal Design Learning (UDL) concepts and assistive technologies to manage programs and processes that are designed to increase the participation and success of students and staff with a disability.</p>	<p>Continue to work with Vision Australia to engage in advanced assistive technology, wearable technology and training. Working with UNE Information Technology Directorate (ITD) and Faculties to adopt UDL and secure up to date technologies. Work with IT on propelling pre-existing technologies i.e. Kaltura and Echo360 to provide in-house transcription and closed captioning services. Provide resources and webinars to help train staff and students on the importance of UDL and assistive technologies and how to use them. Invite schools to help prioritise UDL initiatives.</p>	<p>SA&I ITD</p>	<p><i>June 2021</i></p>
<p>11. Collaboration with Vision Australia and Ally Network to develop a repository of accessible webinars and resources to address the contemporary issues people with disabilities face, including the intersection between culture and disability.</p>	<p>Develop Moodle units for staff and or students interested in professional development (PD) for Specific Learning Disability (SLD).</p>	<p>SA&I UNE Life</p>	<p><i>June 2021</i></p>

OBJECTIVE/DELIVERABLE	MEASUREMENT	ACCOUNTABILITY	TIMELINE
DELIVER AN OUTSTANDING STUDENT EXPERIENCE			
<p>12. Establish systems that accurately measure participation, retention and graduation data of students from diverse backgrounds, including those with a disability. (This ensures compliance with the Higher Education Standards Framework (Threshold Standards) 2015, established by section 58 of the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency Act 2011 (TEQSA Act 2011)).</p>		<p>ITD Student Success</p>	<p><i>June 2021</i></p>
<p>13. Develop a targeted recruitment, retention and success strategy for students from traditionally under-represented backgrounds.</p>		<p>Director, Marketing (MAPA) Director, Student Success</p>	<p><i>September 2020</i></p>
<p>14. Provide accessible, clear, online information about course inherent requirements, from pre-admission onwards.</p>		<p>Academic Board Faculty Deans Director, Student Success</p>	<p><i>June 2021</i></p>
<p>15. Examine the design, delivery and assessment of academic programs for maximising accessibility, in particular by providing learning material in alternative formats and more flexible options for assessments.</p>		<p>Learning & Teaching Transformation (LATT)</p>	<p><i>September 2020</i></p>
<p>16. Upskill staff in the goals of UDL and best practice.</p>		<p>SA&I LATT</p>	<p><i>June 2021</i></p>

OBJECTIVE/DELIVERABLE	MEASUREMENT	ACCOUNTABILITY	TIMELINE
DELIVER AN OUTSTANDING STUDENT EXPERIENCE			
<p>17. Offer regular staff training on more atypical topics such as:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Working with students and staff with SLD. 2. Responding to the psychosocial needs of students and staff. 	<p>Create a repository of accessible resources and webinars to develop a contemporary understanding of inclusion accessibility and equality and to give people the skills and confidence to protect their rights and to actively participate in and contribute to the community.</p>	<p>Director, HRS Manager, SA&I Manager, Counselling & Psychological Services (CAPS)</p>	<p><i>September 2020</i></p>
<p>18. Conduct a biennial Student Survey regarding diversity, with recommendations made to UNE Vice-Chancellor (this may be incorporated into other existing surveys, if suitable).</p>		<p>Vice-Chancellor Head AI&W</p>	<p><i>January 2021</i></p>
<p>19. Consider options for flexible work placements for students (e.g. remote and virtual placements).</p>		<p>LATT Faculty Deans</p>	<p><i>September 2020</i></p>
DIVERSIFY AND GROW INCOME			
<p>20. Develop a Marketing strategy that promotes UNE as the University of choice for inclusive, accessible, flexible and bespoke tertiary education.</p>		<p>Director, Student Success Director, MAPA</p>	<p><i>September 2020</i></p>
<p>21. Teach Universal Design Principles as part of an existing or new degree.</p>		<p>LATT Academic Board</p>	<p><i>August 2020</i></p>


OBJECTIVE/DELIVERABLE	MEASUREMENT	ACCOUNTABILITY	TIMELINE
DIGITAL DOMINANCE			
22. Establish a central area to develop and implement Universal Design Principles for UNE online environment, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - managing accessibility of all databases and Learning Management Systems (LMS); - sourcing and managing licences, such as assistive; technology and specific plug-ins; and - managing WCAG compliance. 		LATT ITD	<i>September 2020</i>
IMPROVE OPERATIONAL RESILIENCE			
23. Develop UNE-wide Equity and Diversity Rule that is supported by an action plan with clear reporting lines and responsibilities.		PVCAI Governance Director, HRS	<i>October 2020</i>
24. Amend UNE procurement processes to include compulsory accessibility and Universal Design provisions.		Director, Finance	<i>October 2020</i>
25. Include staff views on UNE's accessibility and disability support in UNE's Voice Survey .		Director, HRS	<i>Ongoing</i>
26. Embed Universal Design into the Facilities Management processes, including as part of the UNE Campus Master Plan and updates to campus maps and signage.		Director, FMS	<i>December 2020</i>
CREATE A BOLD AND INNOVATIVE CULTURE			
27. Include Disability Awareness and Unconscious Bias training within a compulsory training suite for all staff.		PVCAI Director, HRS	<i>September 2020</i>


OBJECTIVE/DELIVERABLE	MEASUREMENT	ACCOUNTABILITY	TIMELINE
CREATE A BOLD AND INNOVATIVE CULTURE			
<p>28. Establish an award program for staff, who have developed innovative teaching methods that comply with the goals of Universal design and improve student outcomes.</p>		<p>PVCAI Faculty Deans</p>	<p><i>September 2020</i></p>
<p>29. Ensure UNE's staff recruitment strategy clearly reflects a commitment to inclusivity employing individuals best matched to a role, irrespective of disability or background.</p>		<p>Director, HRS</p>	<p><i>October 2020</i></p>

Review and Evaluation

An annual progress report of the AAP deliverables in accordance with the timeframes indicated above, will be provided to UNE Senior Executive via the Chief Operating Officer.

Executive Sponsorship

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Ongoing feedback

This AAP will be regularly updated, and UNE students, staff and visitors are encouraged to provide ongoing input and feedback. To do so please contact:

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