



ANNUAL
REPORT
2025





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1. MESSAGE FROM THE HEAD



It is with a deep sense of responsibility and pride that I present the Disability Rights Unit (DRU) Annual Report for 2025. This report reflects not only a year of sustained operational delivery but also a period of meaningful institutional consolidation, strategic growth, and renewed commitment to advancing disability inclusion, equity, and accessibility across the University.

The year under review was characterised by increasing institutional awareness of disability as a human rights issue rather than a compliance obligation. In this context, the DRU continued to play a central role in translating the University's values, policies, and strategic commitments into tangible practices that promote dignity, equality, and full participation for employees and students with disabilities.

Despite operating within a complex higher education environment marked by resource constraints, infrastructure challenges, and evolving regulatory expectations, the DRU remained steadfast in its mandate to advocate, advise, and support. The Unit's work during 2025 demonstrates the importance of sustained institutional investment in disability rights as a core component of transformation, social justice, and good governance.

Dr Leila Abdool Gafoor



2. THE DISABILITY RIGHTS UNIT (DRU)



The Disability Rights Unit entrance in Solomon Mahlangu House

The DRU plays a vital role in creating an inclusive and accessible environment for all students and staff with disabilities, fostering equitable opportunities for success.

Vision

To be a leading institution that fosters an inclusive, accessible, and empowering environment for students and staff with disabilities, enabling them to thrive academically, professionally, and socially.

Mission

To advocate for, support, and promote the rights of students and staff with disabilities at Wits, ensuring equitable access to education, opportunities, and services, raising awareness and creating a culture of inclusivity on campus.

Core Values

- **Inclusivity:** Creating a welcoming environment for all students and staff.
- **Accessibility:** Ensuring equal access to education, support services and co-curricular activities.
- **Empowerment:** Supporting the independence and success of students and staff with disabilities.
- **Advocacy:** Promoting disability rights and policies that reflect the needs of the community.
- **Collaboration:** Working with all stakeholders, including students, faculty, and external organizations, to enhance accessibility and rights for people with disabilities.



DRU Team (from left to right):

Mr Andrew Sam (Adaptive Technologist), Mrs Subhashini Ellan (Academic & Facilities Access Coordinator), Ms Megan Greaves (SA Sign Language Interpreter), Dr Leila Abdool Gafoor (Head), Mr Bongani Sithole (Accessible Study Content Provider), Ms Londi Mngoma (Receptionist & Social Media), Ms Kobela Petja (Print Impaired Access Coordinator), Ms Arlene Damons (Academic Concessions & Therapy Coordinator)

Front: Mr Alfred Tlou (Tests & Exams Officer)

Not in picture: Mx Tish Geddes

3. KEY ACHIEVEMENTS IN 2025



Disability signage at the Tower of Light
on Braamfontein West Campus

The 2025 reporting period was marked by several notable achievements that collectively strengthened the University's capacity to respond to the needs of persons with disabilities:

Policy Implementation and Practice Development

The Unit played a central role in supporting the implementation of the Policy on the Workplace Inclusion of Employees with Disabilities. This included developing practical guidance materials, process flow tools, and providing advisory support to managers and HR practitioners. These efforts significantly improved consistency, transparency, and accountability in decision-making related to disability inclusion.

Advocacy, Awareness, and Capacity Building

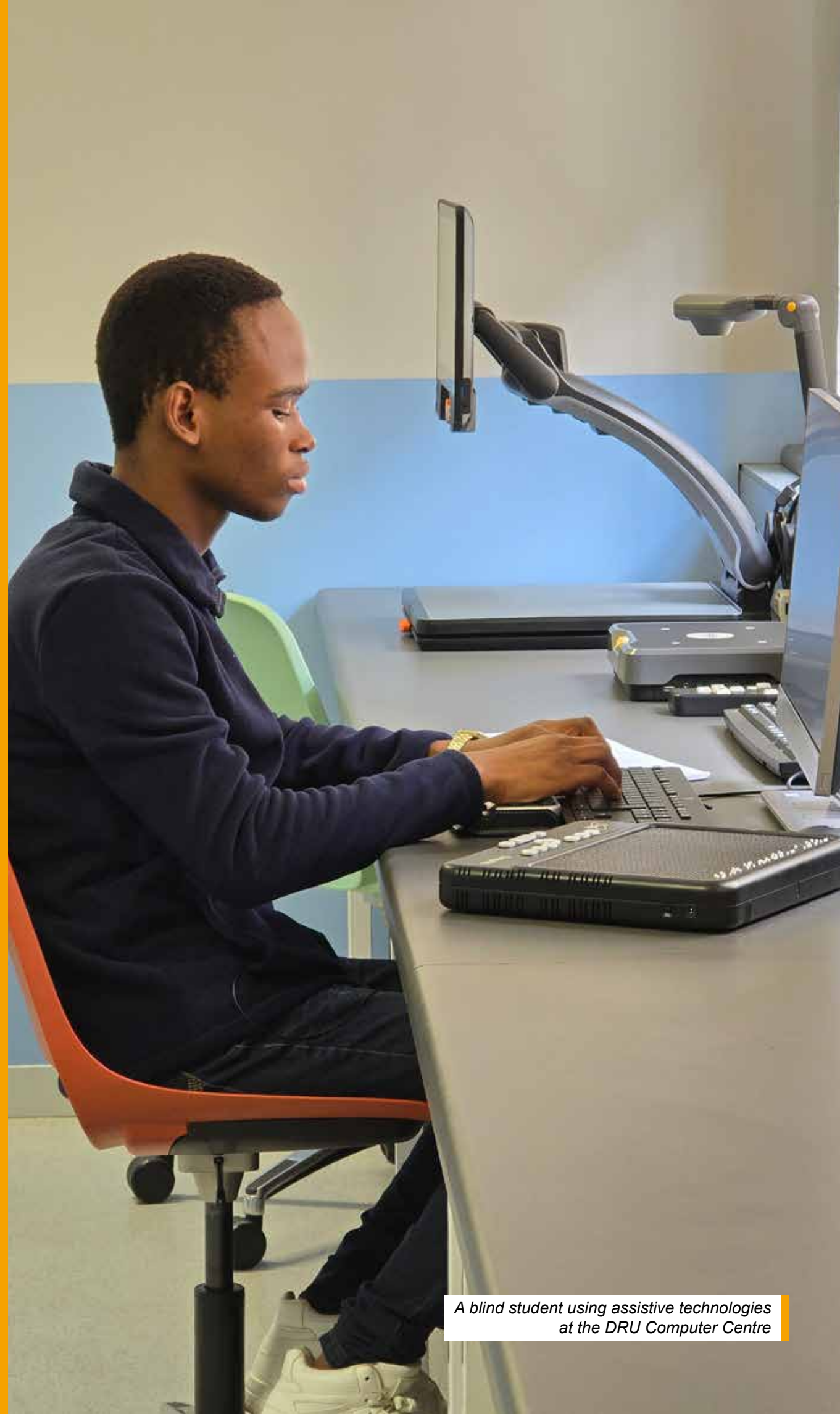
In line with its advocacy mandate, the DRU delivered and supported a range of awareness-raising and capacity-building initiatives during 2025. These included disability sensitisation workshops, manager-focused training sessions, and collaborative engagements with transformation and equity stakeholders. Through these initiatives, the Unit contributed to shifting institutional culture towards greater empathy, understanding, and respect for diversity.

Collaboration and Partnerships

The DRU strengthened collaborative relationships with key internal stakeholders, including Human Resources, Occupational Health and Safety, Property and Infrastructure, and Transformation and Employment Equity structures. These partnerships enabled more coordinated responses to accessibility challenges, improved referral pathways, and more sustainable accommodation solutions.

Infrastructure and Accessibility Interventions

The Unit continued to provide expert input into accessibility audits, infrastructure planning, and the removal of physical and environmental barriers across campus. While acknowledging that systemic infrastructure challenges remain, the DRU's interventions during 2025 contributed to incremental but meaningful improvements in campus accessibility and universal design awareness.



A blind student using assistive technologies at the DRU Computer Centre

4.1. STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The DRU successfully supported a growing number of students through structured academic concessions processes which are detailed on the Unit's website. Wits, through its policy for students with disabilities, is committed to advancing disability inclusion, removing barriers, and creating an enabling environment where all students can optimise their learning.

The DRU provides support services to address the specific needs of full-time students with physical, sensory, learning, and other disabilities, allowing full participation in academic, social, and extracurricular activities at Wits. Through tailored support systems, DRU strives to empower students with disabilities with skills to succeed from their year of entry to the graduation stage. Services include the provision of specialised academic accommodations, assistive technology, personalised support services, and guidance and training on navigating the campus environment, as elaborated on in the report.

Academic accommodations: Academic support includes facilitating concessions such as extra time, separate venue, typing or adaptive technology, for tests and exams. Course material can also be converted into alternative print accessible formats for students with visual impairments.

- Number of new concessions processed in 2025: 195
- Number of concession consultations held in 2025: 372

Assistive technology: Specialised hardware and software that assists students with disabilities by ensuring equal access to the academic environment, (e.g. screen readers, speech-to-text, and reading software). In addition, DRU supported students with loaning of equipment and assistive devices (e.g. laptops, braille devices, assistive hearing devices, motorised wheelchairs, and other mobility aids).

- 32 specialised training sessions were held with students and staff.

Accessible course material: Converting study materials into accessible formats involves adapting learning materials for students with visual impairments or dyslexia and implementing these adaptations within the learning environment and materials to ensure equal access to education. This includes modifying prescribed resources to offer large-print, accessible readings, and Braille upon request. Assistive technology, such as screen readers (including NVDA and JAWS) and magnifiers, can also play a crucial role in enabling access to digital content.

- In 2025, DRU students requested 458 readings, totalling 6182 pages, to be converted into accessible formats, of which 207 were brailled.

Mobility training: DRU provided mobility training services for students with visual and mobility impairments, helping them to navigate more independently on campuses.

- 694 access consultations, including mobility training sessions were undertaken to address students' physical access support needs.

Sign language interpretation: South African Sign Language (SASL) Interpretation involves accurately conveying a conversation's meaning, tone, and intent. The DRU also offers lip-speaking services. Lip-speaking is a specialised form of communication support where a trained professional silently reproduces spoken language using clear lip movements, facial expressions, and gestures to assist individuals who rely on speech-reading. Lip speaking does not use SASL sentence structure, rather, it is a reproduction of spoken language using visual cues to make it easier to see.

In 2025, the DRU ran a Deaf awareness initiative in September on our social media that received good engagement, where we got Deaf academics and students to tell us in a short video what Deaf awareness means to them. SASLI's at the DRU also identified a policy gap for interpreters which we are currently working on for 2026.

- The DRU's SASLI's spent 284 hours, supporting students who are Deaf in their academic programmes.

Tests and examinations: The DRU has introduced an online test and exam request form to streamline how students apply to write tests. The advantages of this being:

- A paperless, more efficient system with improved turnaround times and reduced manual storage of paperwork.
- Online submissions are done in real time, making it convenient for students and the DRU's test/exam officer.
- The test and exam form has all the required details viz. date and time of submission, test/exam date and time, duration and is remotely accessible records at any time.
- From this, the DRU's Tests and Exams officer creates a composite timetable for students' exams and deferred or supplementary examinations.
- A daily DRU schedule is compiled with exam start and finish times including extra-time concession allowances.
- DRU staff assist with exams based on a weekly invigilation roster. Tests and exams times are closely monitored by DRU staff invigilators.
- Strict controls are adhered to in line with EGO's rules and procedures for the receipt and collection of exam scripts. For tests collected at the DRU, there are signed records.
- In 2025, the SRC's disability representative arranged small tokens of well wishes for students taking exams at the DRU centre.

June and November 2025 exam and test statistics for 2025 are as follows for Braamfontein main and Parktown education campuses:

- Student headcount – 180
- Number of tests written at both DRU offices – 365
- Invigilation total hours – 623



DRU students at their graduation ceremony in the Great Hall



4.2. STAFF WITH DISABILITIES

The DRU strives to foster a disability inclusive work culture where staff with disabilities have equitable opportunities for success, retention and advancement, with reasonable accommodations provided by their departments.

In 2025, the DRU's support to Wits employees involved 435 consultations with 87 staff with long-term and temporary mobility and other disabilities for campus access facilitation which links closely to the built-environment accessibility.

The DRU's Online Physical Access form was implemented towards the latter part of 2025 to receive and facilitate requests for disability parking, campus drop-off, disability gates, elevator and other built-environment accesses.

Reasonable Accommodation and Case Management: Human Resources (HR) involves the DRU in the consultations about the provision of work-reasonable accommodation. The DRU's consultative role is primarily to staff with disabilities and line managers, informing them about voluntary online disability disclosure and the processes to request work-reasonable accommodation from their respective departments, for them to perform to the inherent requirements of their jobs. Based on occupational therapist's functional capacity evaluations, the DRU, in alignment with the Wits Policy on the Workplace Inclusion of Employees with Disabilities may offer guidance on reasonable accommodations for employees who transition back to work following a temporary incapacity period. Reasonable accommodations vary and are tailored on a case-by-case basis. These interventions contribute to job retention, improved performance, and enhanced well-being, while ensuring alignment with institutional policies and legal requirements.

Wits Policies: Updates to The Policy on the Workplace Inclusion of Employees with Disabilities was approved by the university Council in September of 2025. The DRU works closely with Human Resources (HR) in line with this policy, which is located on the HR, Registrar's and DRU websites. Other relevant HR policies refer for staff disability matters.

Types of staff disability matters: Similar to students with disabilities that the DRU supports, employees' disabilities range from physical, visual and hearing impairments to non-visible disabilities like neurodivergence, psychological diagnoses and chronic illnesses. Several Wits staff undertake part-time studies. A supportive work culture will lend itself to staff feeling comfortable to voluntarily disclose their disabilities earlier on to HR, ie. during the recruitment and on-boarding stages. This facilitates earlier work reasonable accommodation implementation. Disability disclosure that occurs later in the employment cycle of an employee has not necessarily been budgeted for by departments and schools.

Assistive Technology: The DRU's Adaptive technologist assists with the recommendations for ergonomic equipment and assistive technology options for staff with disabilities, like screen readers or ergonomic equipment. Employees who present with hand-related physical impairments experience limitations in their typing abilities, which may warrant, voice recognition software as a work reasonable accommodation, subject to available funding.

Digital Accessibility: Efforts continue by the DRU to collaborate with ICT (Computer technology) and CLTD (the Centre for Learning Teaching and Development) to improve accessibility on Wits' online platforms, learning materials and improvements to sound transmission in key venues like the Senate room. A DRU Lecturer's Guide was developed in 2025 and uploaded on the online learning management system and DRU website.

DRU collaborations with Human Resources Information Systems (HRIS): In 2025 there were upgrades to the online disability disclosure option on i-Wits which links to the University's staff Oracle records. HRIS and the DRU assist staff with their online disability capture. Further workflow enhancements involve notifications sent to HR managers for new online disability disclosures. The online disability disclosure development is intended to help with the statistical integrity for the Transformation office's reporting on employees with disabilities at Wits.



A staff wheelchair user at the Solomon Mahlangu House Basement internal ramp

Training and Awareness: More focus and awareness of non-visible disabilities like neurodivergence diagnoses came to the fore. DRU efforts were consolidated to compile a manual as a guideline document on the management of staff with disabilities for the Human Resources Development Unit (HRDU) prospectus, based upon the Policy on the Workplace Inclusion of Employees with Disabilities. 130 staff disability awareness and sensitisation information and training sessions were achieved in 2025.

Other support: The DRU has representation on the Faculty of Health Science's Wellness committee, where input is given on accessibility for the people with disabilities, as part of the committee's terms of reference. By invitation from the HR department, the DRU presented at the Faculty of Health Science's HR 911 presentations on the Policy on the Workplace Inclusion of Staff with disabilities. The same HR department also invited the DRU for awareness presentations at Professional Staff & Senior Management induction sessions.

4.3. EXTERNAL AND INTERNAL PARTNERSHIPS AND COLLABORATIONS

During the 2025 reporting period, DRU significantly strengthened its institutional sustainability and programmatic reach through strategic partnerships and the successful mobilisation of external funding. These partnerships reflect growing confidence in DRU's governance, innovation capacity, and alignment with national and regional development priorities.

FUCHS Grant Funding (R50,000):

This funding contributed to targeted operational support and early-stage program activities, strengthening DRU's ability to deliver focused interventions and maintain operational effectiveness.

AFRETEC Grant Funding (R1.6 million):

The AFRETEC grant represented a major investment in DRU's technology-driven initiatives. The funding enabled the development and scaling of advanced technical projects, the Enhancement of the WEC offices into a Disability Rights Hub, and supported collaborative innovation aligned with continental skills development and industrial transformation objectives.

Energy Mobility Grant Funding (R250,000):

This grant supported energy- and mobility-related initiatives, contributing to sustainable, ergonomic, and adaptive technology solutions and activities to address mobility challenges.

Collectively, these partnerships and funding streams played a critical role in advancing DRU's 2025 strategic goals. External support not only strengthened financial

sustainability but also enabled DRU to expand its impact, deepen collaboration with industry and academic partners, and accelerate the translation of research and innovation into practical, high-impact outcomes.

Benchmarking by the North-West University (NWU) and the Registrar of the Great Zimbabwe University (GZU) took place with Wits' DRU on disability support service provision in higher education.

The DRU Head of Department's role as Vice-President on the **Higher Education Disability Services Association (HEDSA)** NPO has added value for national best practices in the field of higher education disability support.

External networking and collaborations with the **South African Employers for Disability (SAE4D)** continues in 2026.

Internal Collaborations

In partnership with the Schools Liaison department, the DRU presented the Unit's tertiary support services at two schools for learners with disabilities, as part of the recruitment of learners to qualify to study at Wits.

The DRU participated in the Faculty of Health Science's OSS department's Everyone Blooms programme imparting information on support services available to students at Wits.

Centrally, as part of HRDU's Organisational Induction session on People Portfolios, the DRU presented on support for staff with disabilities. Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) monitoring of environmental risks like slippery wheelchair ramps and floor surfaces play a key part in proactive prevention of temporary and permanent disablement. Emergency protocols and training of evacuation coordinators to safely evacuate wheelchair-users and people with mobility impairments is also important.

The Exams and Graduation (EGO) office's graduation wheelchair ushers assist students and guests with disabilities during graduation ceremonies. Campus Protection Services assists with shuttle services for mobility-impaired persons to the Wits Great Hall where the graduation ceremonies are held. The Wits Parking office assists with disability parking accommodations during the period when the graduation ceremonies are held.

The DRU also gave input to the Marketing department's Wits Visual Identity & Signage Manual regarding campus disability signage and online disability access maps.

5. STUDENT STATISTICS



*A DRU student wheelchair user
outside the Emthonjeni Building*

In 2025, 1126 students indicated having a disability, with a diverse range of needs across all disabilities. Students with disabilities were represented across all faculties, reflecting the university’s need to foster inclusivity in diverse academic disciplines.

Disability types were grouped into the following categories:

Visual impairments (128 students) – Ranging from low vision to complete blindness, these students benefited from assistive technologies such as screen readers, magnifiers, braille devices and accessible course material.

Hearing impairments (31 students) – Encompasses students who are Deaf or hard of hearing, often supported through sign language interpretation, live captioning, and assistive listening devices.

Neurodevelopmental disabilities (307 students) – This is the largest group, including students with conditions such as ADHD, autism spectrum disorders, and learning disabilities.

Psychosocial disabilities (175 students) – this includes students experiencing mental health conditions like anxiety, depression, and bipolar disorder that impact their academic participation.

Multiple disabilities (190 students) – Students with more than one type of disability requiring integrated support services. 61% of these students indicated having neurodevelopmental disabilities and/or psychosocial disabilities.

Chronic illnesses and impairments (133 students) – This includes students with long-term medical conditions such as diabetes, epilepsy, and autoimmune conditions that affect their daily functioning.

Physical disabilities (106 students) – Includes mobility impairments requiring wheelchair access, adaptive mobility equipment, and ergonomic support.

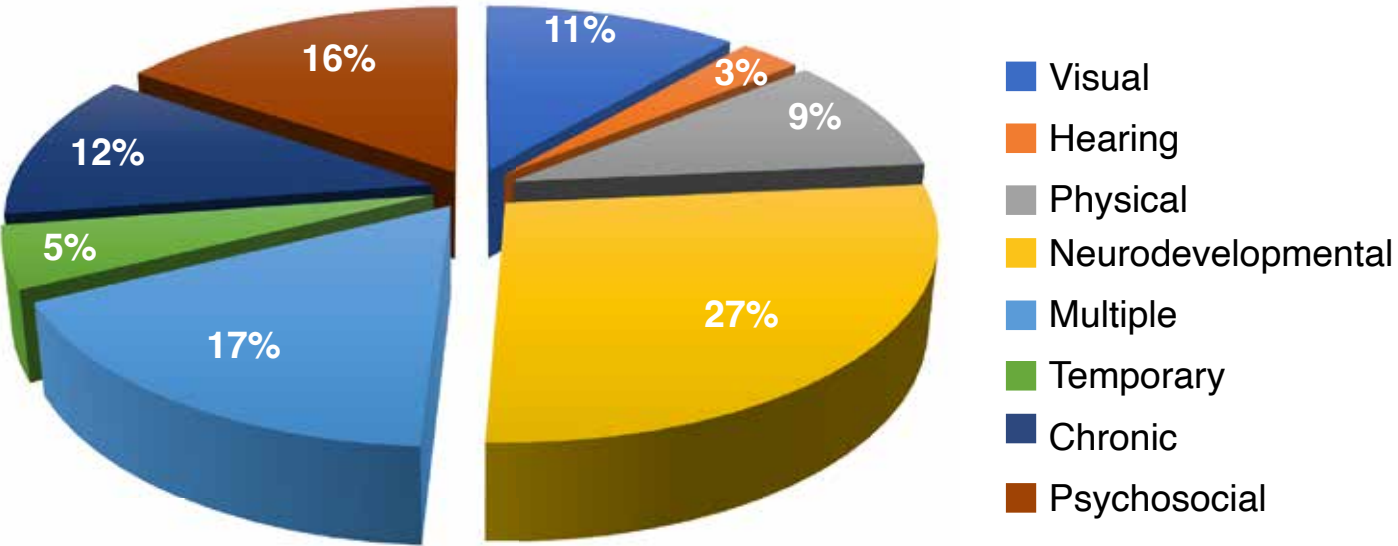
Temporary disabilities (56 students) – Covers students with short-term conditions such as injuries, surgeries, or medical recuperation requiring temporary accommodations.

The **overall percentage of students with disabilities**, compared to the total Wits student population, is **2.7%**, with slight variations across faculties. It highlights the DRU’s reliance on academic departments, the need for inclusive and accessible learning environments, and support through faculty-specific inclusive initiatives with teaching and learning methods and practices. By engaging with the DRU to better understand our students’ diverse needs, we can ensure that every individual has the necessary support to succeed academically and in the world of work.

A breakdown of the number of students by disability type, degree type, the number of new students with disabilities, race, gender, faculty and full-time vs part-time students is shown below.

Students by Disability

Type of Disability	No.of Students
Visual	128
Hearing	31
Physical	106
Neurodevelopmental	307
Psychosocial	175
Multiple	190
Chronic	133
Temporary	56
TOTAL	1126

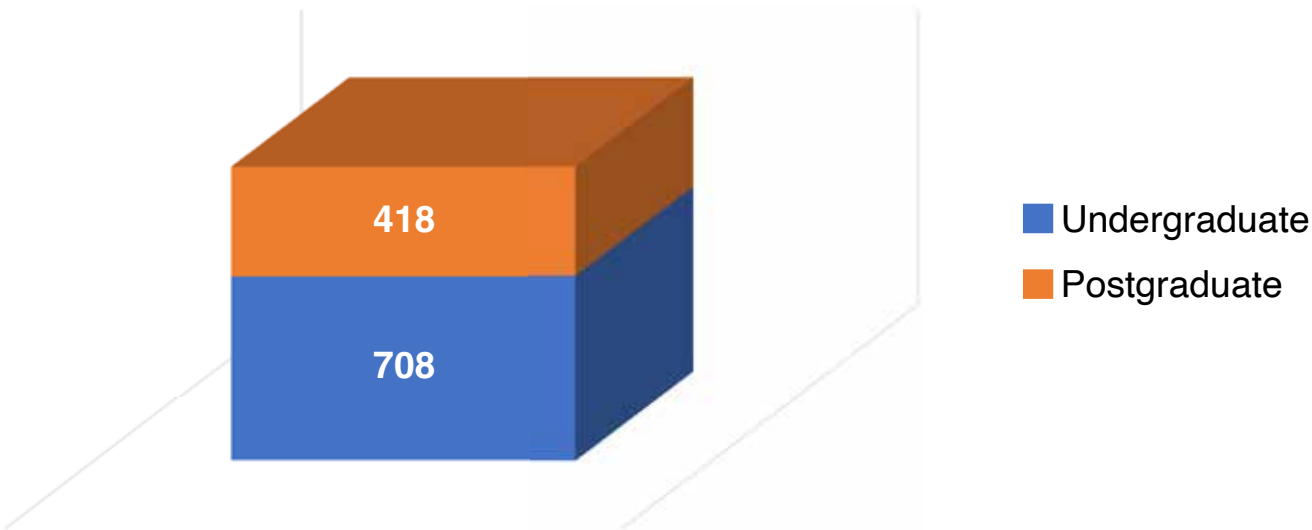


Students with Multiple Disabilities

- Of the 190 students who indicated multiple disabilities:
- **33%** indicated having a **Neurodevelopmental** disability.
 - **33%** indicated having a **Psychosocial** disability.
 - **12%** indicated having a **Chronic Illness**.
 - **7%** indicated having a **Physical** disability.
 - **6%** indicated having a **Visual** disability.
 - **5%** indicated having a **Temporary** disability.
 - **4%** indicated having a **Hearing** disability.

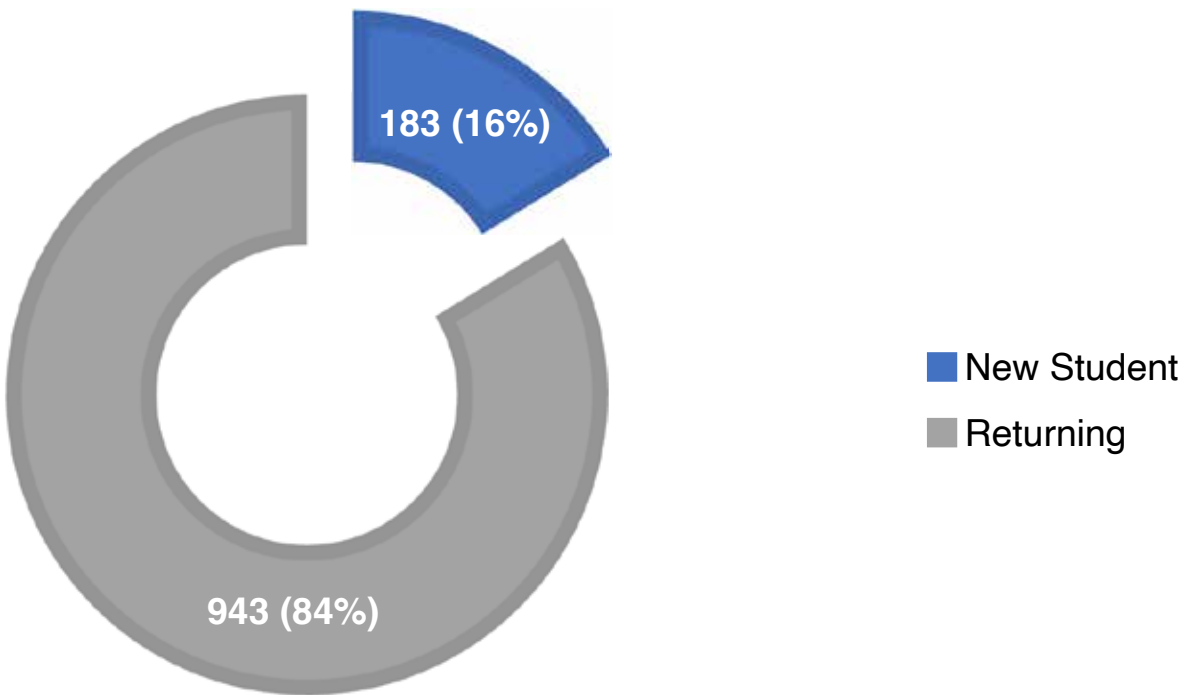
Students with Disabilities by Degree Type

As seen below, 63% of students with disabilities who received support from the DRU were undergraduates, and 37% were postgraduates.



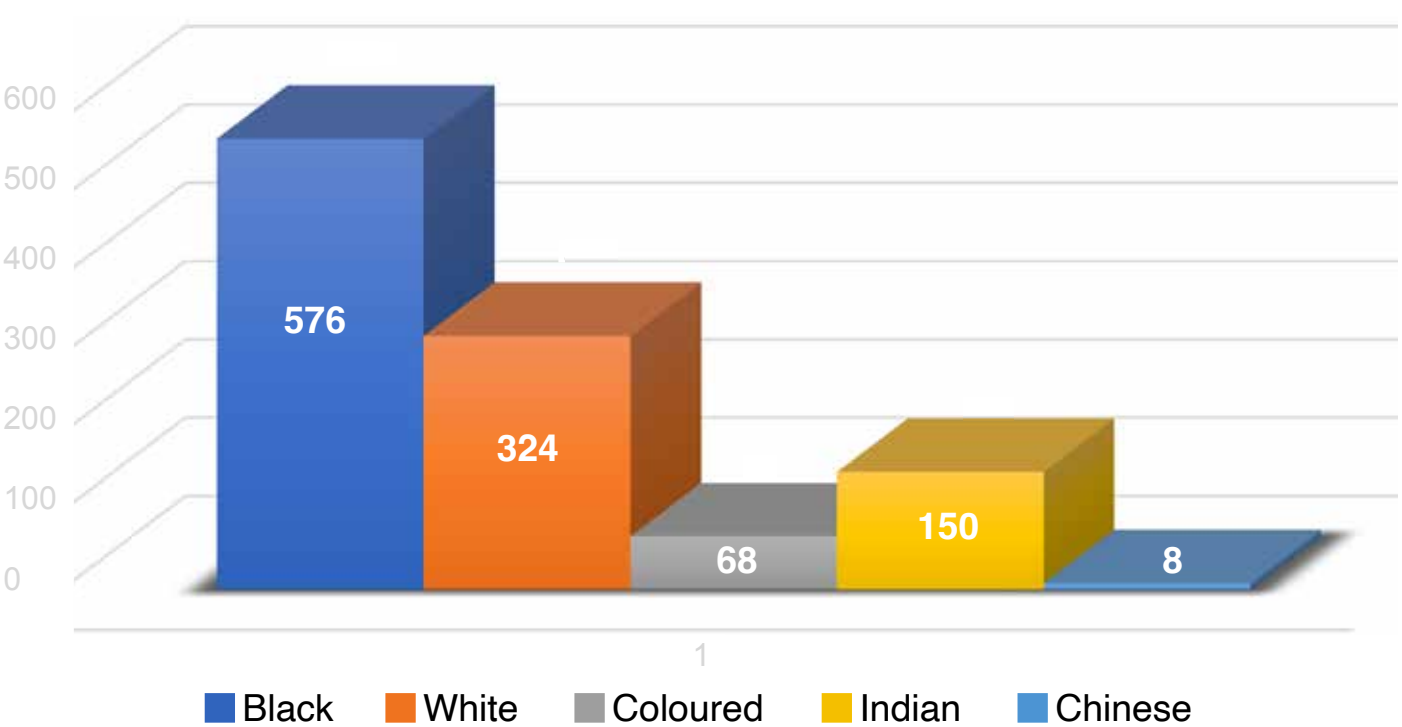
New Students with Disabilities at Wits

Of the students mentioned above, 183 (16%) were new to Wits.



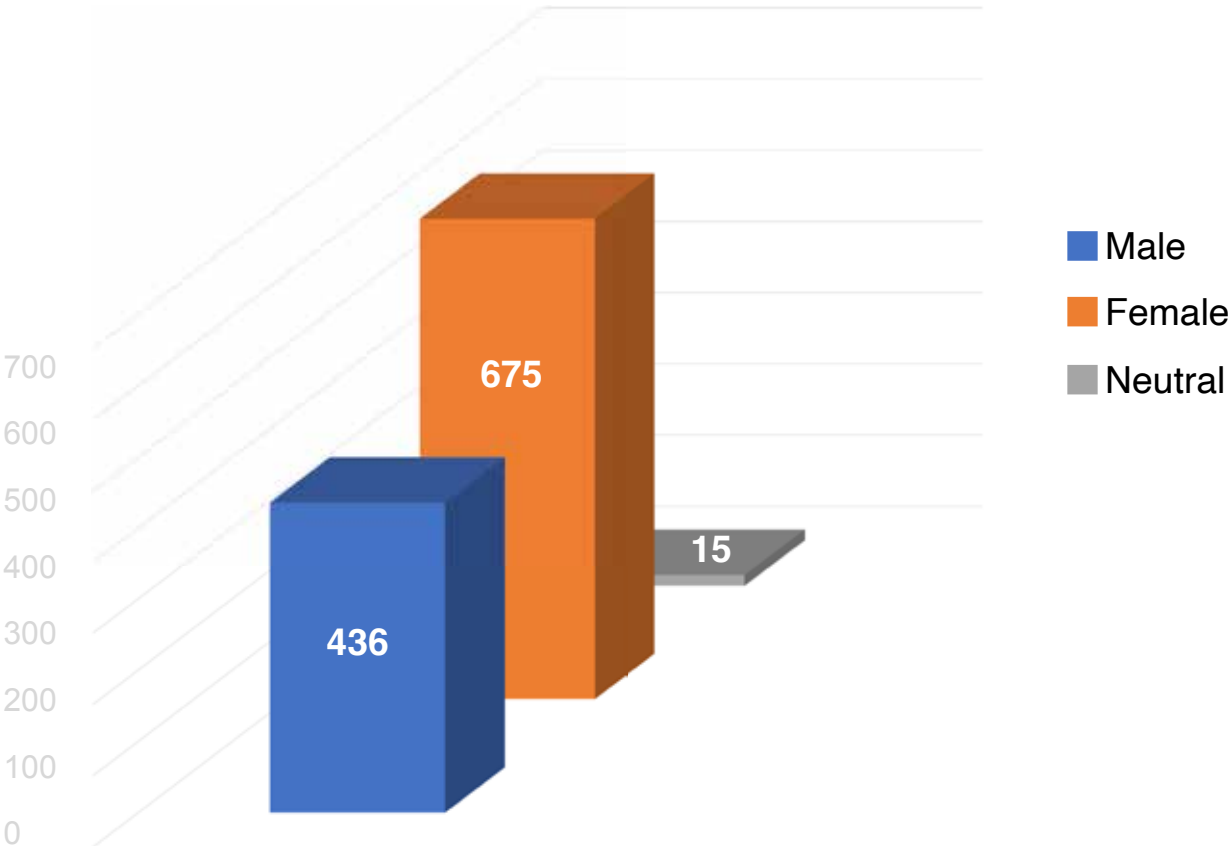
Students with Disabilities by Race

In the breakdown below, according to race, the majority of students accessing the services of the DRU are Black (576) and those least accessing DRU services are Chinese (8).



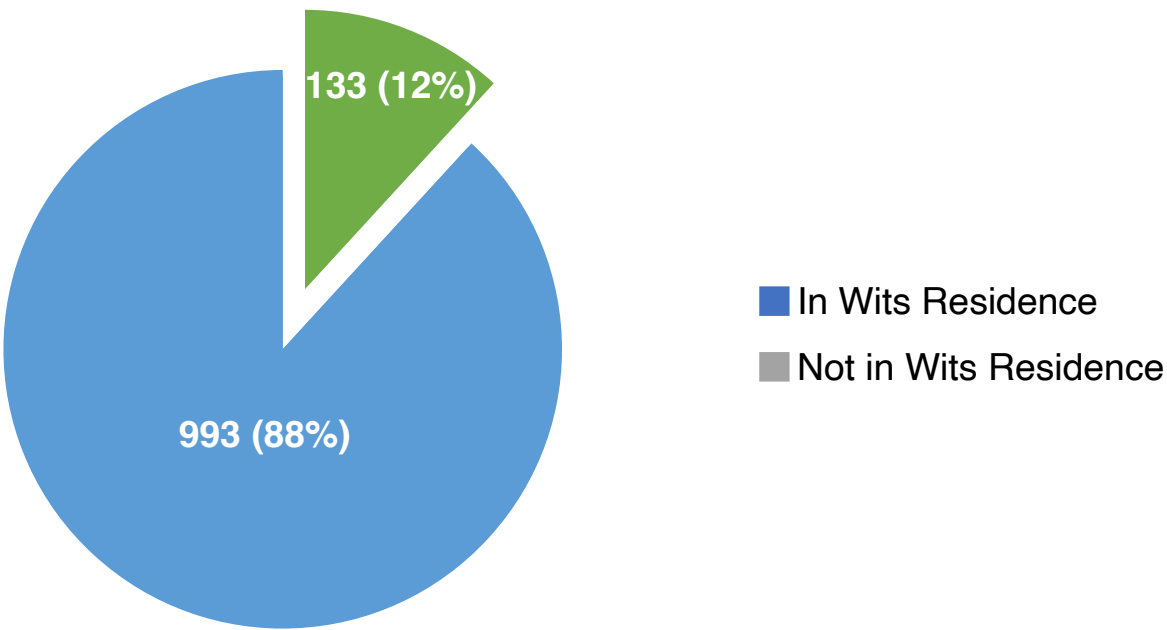
Students with Disabilities by Gender

In the graph below, the majority are female students (60%) accessing the DRU services, followed by male (39%) and gender neutral (1%).



Students with Disabilities in Wits Residences

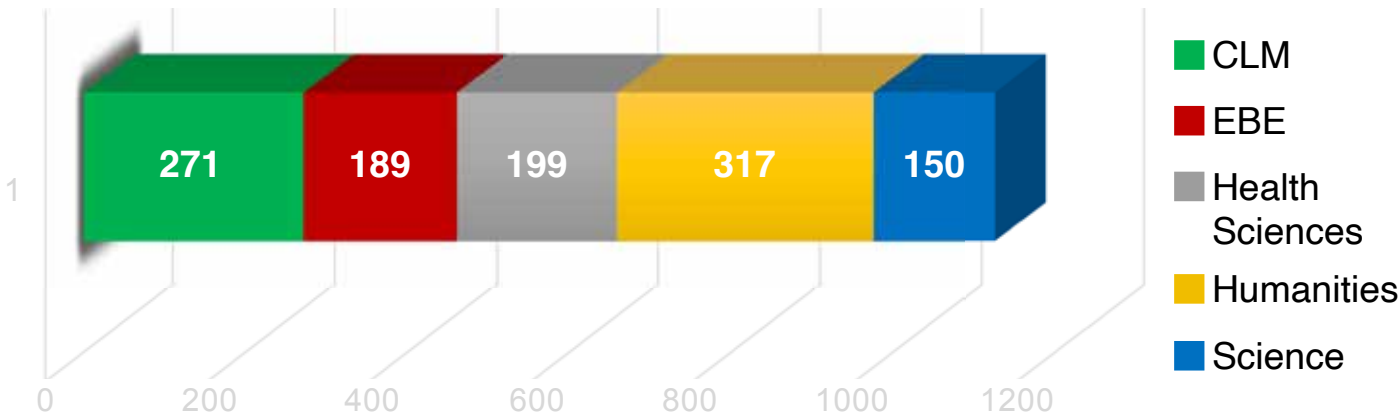
Only 12% of students with disabilities stayed in Wits’ residences in 2025.



Students with Disabilities per Faculty in 2025

Faculty	Number of Students with Disabilities	Total Number of Wits Students	Percentage of Students with Disabilities in each Faculty
Commerce, Law & Management	271	10293	2.6%
Engineering and the Built Environment	189	8000	2.4%
Health Sciences	199	7591	2.6%
Humanities	317	10532	3.0%
Science	150	5764	2.6%
TOTAL	1126	42180	2.7%

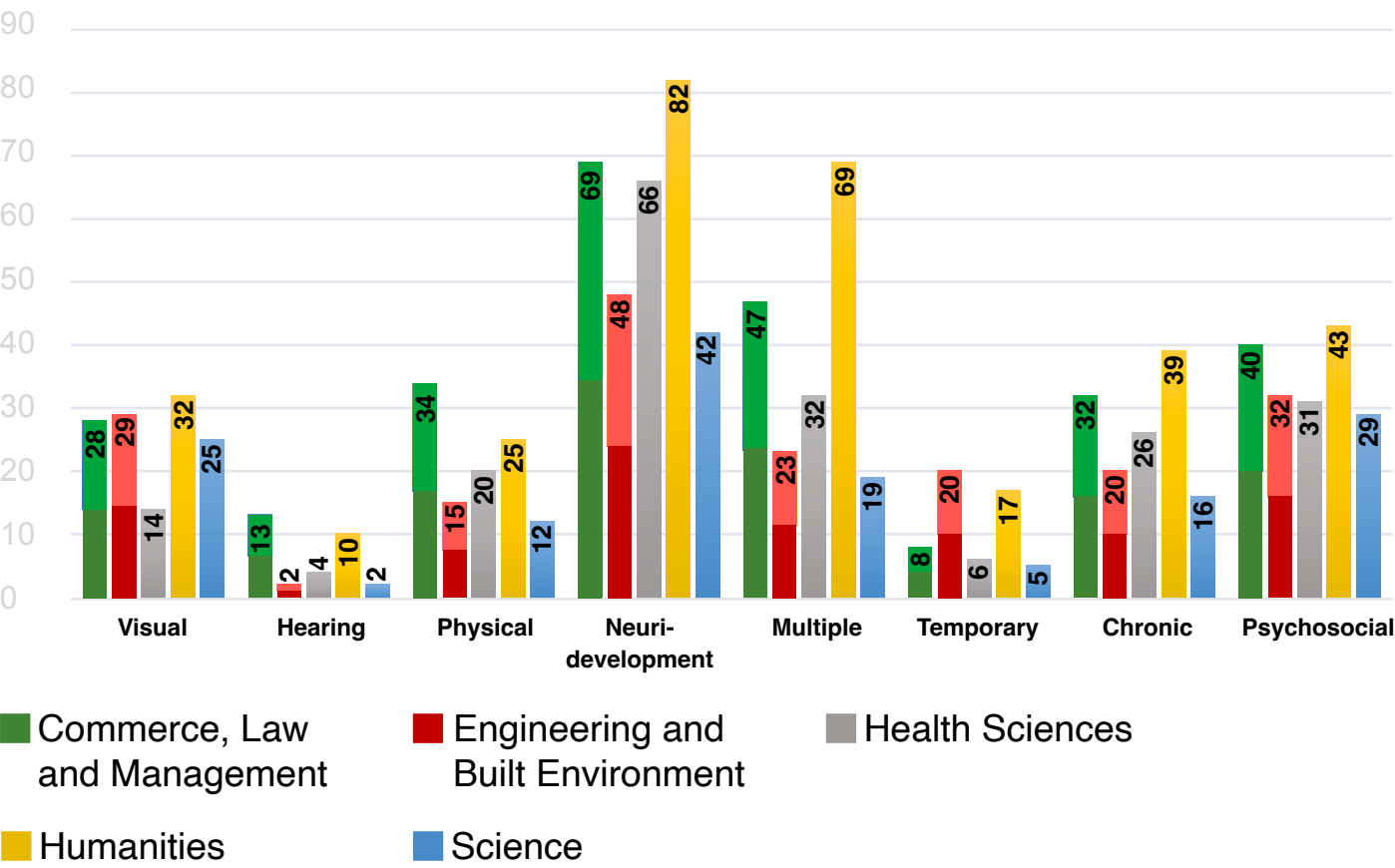
As seen above, 2.7% of students at Wits disclosed disabilities. And below, Humanities have the largest percentage of students with disabilities in their faculty.



Student Distribution by Disability Types per Faculty in 2025

Looking at the distribution of disability types per faculty, Humanities (317) and CLM (271) had the highest numbers of students with disabilities, together accounting for just over half (52%) of the total. Humanities had the largest share of students in five categories: neurodevelopmental (82), psychosocial (43), multiple (69), chronic (39) and visual impairments (32). CLM had the largest share of students with physical disabilities (34) and of Deaf or hard of hearing students (13). EBE had the largest share of students with temporary disabilities (20). Visual impairments were spread fairly evenly across faculties, with Humanities (32), EBE (29) and CLM (28) close together.

Disability Types	Commerce, Law and Management	Engineering and Built Environment	Health Sciences	Humanities	Science
Visual	28	29	14	32	25
Hearing	13	2	4	10	2
Physical	34	15	20	25	12
Neurodevelopmental	69	48	66	82	42
Multiple	47	23	32	69	19
Temporary	8	20	6	17	5
Chronic	32	20	26	39	16
Psychosocial	40	32	31	43	29
Total	271	189	199	317	150



6. CAMPUS ACCESSIBILITY



Wheelchair ramp signage on Braamfontein East Campus

The Disability Rights Unit (DRU) works tirelessly to consult with Wits' entities like the Campus Planning Department (CPD) and Operations and Facilities Management Department (OFMD) and advocate for ongoing campus-accessibility improvements. With each year bringing new access challenges it has initiated a process of developing a Wits spatial access policy.

Disability requires collaborations with most sectors across the University. Efforts to incrementally improve physical access to university buildings, campus facilities and grounds management, disability ablutions and residences continue with the DRU's ongoing collaborations with Wits Campus Planning and Property and Infrastructure departments. The Braamfontein precinct improvement project, as part of the Wit's mobility masterplan, has improved wheelchair accessibility with roads being elevated to the level of pavements around the campus and wheelchair kerb drops incorporated.

In 2025 these collaborations involved 517 access consultations and site visits. Beyond this, 694 consultations were held with students and 435 with staff with long-term and temporary mobility disabilities to facilitate accessibility accommodations to lecture venues, residences, inter-campus transport and disability bathroom facilities.

The new disability drop-off zone in the Solomon Mahlangu House basement has ramp and handrail access. Achieved in partnership with the CPS, Parking Office and OFM departments.

Mobility training: The DRU provides mobility training to students with visual and mobility impairments. This involves orienting wheelchair and visually impaired students with the campus environment for their independent movement. Student loans of motorised wheelchairs and assistive equipment like mobile hearing loop devices that the DRU has fundraised for, is on a first-come-first serve basis.

Physical Accessibility: Campus buildings with older elevators are particularly important to be monitored and upgraded for reliable and consistent accessibility for Wits staff, students and visitors with mobility impairments. The Property and Infrastructure department is tasked to regularly monitor elevators which are necessary to ensure wheelchair accessibility. There are older and heritage Wits buildings which are in need of elevator upgrades.

The DRU also provided access input to Sports facilities like existing gyms and the development of the Zylstra World class sports complex.

Transport accessibility: students who incur mobility impairment injuries and use mobility assistive equipment temporarily, request transport assistance to commute between lectures and their campus residences. Students with disabilities are integrated at Wits' residences. Wits inter-campus wheelchair-accessible buses are made available through the Transport Services department.

Disability Parking: The Wits Parking office issues disability-parking permits with the assistance of the DRU's review of access requests and medical supporting documents. Improvements of disability parking bays have taken place aligned to SANS 10400 Part S disability compliance standards. The DRU advocated for more disability parking bays at the medical school and other campuses. Like public disability parking spaces, Wits' disability bays operate on a first-come-first serve basis. If disability bays are occupied near a building, it poses a challenge for disabled users who then need to arrive as early as possible to secure a hunting disabled parking bay. A visitors' disability parking space has now been catered for at the main administration building.

Drop-off and collection access on campus: The DRU implemented an online Physical Access request form. It helps to facilitate access with Campus Protection Service for students and staff with mobility disabilities to be dropped as close as possible to buildings on campus. It also helps care givers to access campus to assist students with more significant physical access needs.



Wider disability parking bays



Traffic calming measures installed for blind students and wheelchair users crossing the road near Men's Residence



Blind students crossing signage

Through advocacy and awareness initiatives, the DRU strives to foster a disability-inclusive culture across all sectors at Wits for students and staff with disabilities to feel they belong. The DRU's disability awareness and sensitisation efforts need to be ongoing, or entities tend to overlook disability and generally plan for mainstream able-bodied people, which reflects society in general.

Awareness and Sensitisation: The DRU annually undertakes disability refresher sensitisation and awareness sessions for campus protection officers, transport drivers of wheelchair-accessible buses, dining hall and residence staff. These continual efforts are aimed at educating the Wits community on disability rights and inclusion. The student body is exposed to disability awareness, for example, at the Speech and Audiology diversity module. The DRU highlighted Deaf Awareness Month with a South African Sign Language (SASL) social media campaign. Students registered with the DRU for disability support, receive a periodic newsletter called enABLE.

- DRU was involved in **394** disability information-giving interactions and workshops in 2025.

Welcome Day, Gateway to Success & First Year Experience Programmes: The DRU is one of the active participants in the university-wide Welcome Day and Gateway to Success (GTS) orientation programmes for first year students. In the follow-on First Year Experience (FYE) programme, the DRU held 6 face-to-face and 4 online first-year experience talks at student residences.

DRU's Disability Interest Group (DIG): The DIG provides a platform for staff and students to meet quarterly to engage on various disability topics and themes to promote a culture of disability inclusion at Wits. Disability sensitisation and awareness occur through this platform for dialogue. Entities across the university are accountable for disability-inclusive practices. Key stakeholders provide updates on their efforts to reduce barriers to disability access, which includes the teaching and learning environment.

Social Media Activities: In 2025, the DRU actively engaged with students, staff, and the broader university community through various social media, using these platforms to disseminate information, promote services, and foster an inclusive environment for persons with disabilities at Wits.



Disability signage near the Great Hall

Challenges and Areas for Improvement:

Generally, students who transition from Special Needs schools take time to become competent in the use of computer assistive technology. This can slow down the student's pace of tertiary learning and keeping abreast of their academic demands.

- **Resource Limitations:** Increased awareness of Wits' disability policies and support services has led to more disability disclosures, increasing demand for accommodations, assistive equipment, ergonomic furniture, assessments, and support, which may require additional funding and staffing.

Strategic Positioning for Institutional Impact:

During 2025, the DRU strengthened its position as a trusted institutional partner, providing expert guidance to senior leadership, faculties, divisions, and support units on disability-related matters. The Unit's work was firmly aligned with the University's transformation agenda, employment equity objectives, and commitments to inclusive education and employment practices.

A key strategic achievement was the DRU's contribution to the review, implementation, and operationalisation of institutional policies and practice notes related to disability inclusion, reasonable accommodation, and accessibility. Through this work, the DRU ensured that policy intent was translated into clear, actionable processes that support both rights-holders and duty-bearers within the institution.

The Unit also played an increasingly proactive role in institutional planning processes, contributing to discussions on infrastructure development, remote and flexible working arrangements, and the design of accessible learning and working environments. This shift from reactive intervention to proactive inclusion marks an important maturation of the DRU's institutional role.

The Way Forward:

The achievements outlined in this report must be understood within the broader context of ongoing institutional transformation. Disability inclusion is not a fixed end state but a continuous process that requires sustained leadership commitment, adequate resourcing, and a willingness to confront structural inequalities.

Looking ahead, the DRU remains committed to deepening its strategic impact by strengthening data-informed planning, expanding preventative and early-intervention approaches, and continuing to embed disability considerations into mainstream institutional processes. The Unit will also prioritise enhanced monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to better demonstrate impact and inform continuous improvement.

9. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Acknowledgement goes to the dedication and professionalism of the DRU staff, whose expertise and commitment underpin the Unit's achievements. The DRU also extends appreciation to our institutional partners, line managers, and members of the University community who engaged constructively with the DRU's work during 2025. Their collaboration is essential to building a university that is truly inclusive, accessible, and respectful of the rights and dignity of all.

This Annual Report stands as both an account of progress made and a call to action. It reaffirms our collective responsibility to ensure that disability rights remain central to the University's transformation journey and institutional identity.



