

**Tertiary Education
Commission**
Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua



Disability Action Plans

**Guidance for TEOs submitting Plans
for funding from 2026**

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Foreword

The education sector has initiated many reforms in recent times to make compulsory education more accessible for disabled children and young people. We have also seen some good initiatives and outcomes in the tertiary sector. However, overall participation and success of disabled people in tertiary education falls below that of non-disabled persons. Disabled people are over-represented in negative education-related statistics. In June 2020, 48.2 percent of young disabled people (15–24 years) were not in employment, education or training, compared with 10.6 percent of young non-disabled people.

The **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities 2008**² (the Convention), Article 24, commits New Zealand to “ensure an inclusive education system at all levels”. Supported by related legislation and guidelines,³ the Convention requires that disabled people be given equal opportunity to participate in and contribute to the range of social, political and cultural activities. Access for disabled people, including access to the goods, services and facilities provided by tertiary education organisations, must not be an afterthought. The intent of the Convention is not about limited or “parallel” access, or additional rights, it is intended to promote and protect equality of physical, informational and attitudinal access.

The introduction of Disability Action Plans (DAPs) at tertiary education organisations is a further step towards the tertiary sector improving its response to disabled learners.

Enabled through the **Kia Ōrite Toolkit** for Achieving an Inclusive and Equitable Tertiary Education Environment for Disabled Learners, DAPs have the capacity to support the systemic change that is required to eliminate disability discrimination whether it be intentional or unintentional. A DAP will assist a tertiary education organisation to better meet its objective of providing high-quality educational services to the whole community, of which disabled people constitute some 25 percent (lifetime prevalence).

¹ Statistics New Zealand (2020) Measuring Inequality for disabled New Zealanders.

² <https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities.html>

³ Human Rights Act 1993; NZ Government Disability Action Plan 2019 - 2023; the Education Act 1989; the Crown Entities Act 2004; Employment Relations Act 2000 and Government Accessibility Standards (1.1)

Providing a copy of your DAP to the TEC as part of your Investment Plan process is an important component of your organisation's commitment to equality of opportunity for all.

We recommend this guide to you, and look forward to the tangible advantage that will result for the whole community as disabled people are able to benefit from and effectively contribute to the educational, social, cultural, political and economic environment in which we all live.

**Paula Tesoriero MNZM,
Disability Rights Commissioner, Human Rights Commission (2017 – 2022)**

A. Introduction and framing

1. What is a Disability Action Plan?

A Disability Action Plan (DAP) is a strategy for changing those practices of tertiary education organisations that might result in discrimination (intentional or unintentional) against disabled people and to improve outcomes for disabled learners in their education journey. A DAP will help your organisation to identify these practices and offer a blueprint for change.

A DAP must include certain components:

- clear evidence of use of the Kia Ōrite toolkit and the best practice standards described in it;
- goals and targets;
- evaluation strategies;
- allocation of responsibility; and
- communication of policies and programmes.

This guide outlines each of these requirements and is specifically designed for tertiary education organisations.

2. How a DAP can assist your organisation

DAPs are not just designed to ensure compliance with a funding requirement. Implementing a DAP will produce many benefits for an organisation, including the following.

Encourage broader participation

Approximately 25 percent of New Zealanders will experience living with a permanent or temporary disability. When relatives, friends, carers and colleagues or associates of disabled people are included, this group represents a sizeable share of the New Zealand population of potential capable learners, whose talents should not be ignored by the tertiary education sector.

A DAP will encourage disabled people to use your organisation's services, and your learner population will become more reflective of the broader New Zealand community.

Boost prestige and maintain high levels of demand

Learners want to study at reputable tertiary education organisations.

As a public statement about commitment to practices that eliminate discrimination, a DAP will boost the prestige of your organisation – not just within groups of disabled people, but within the broader community as well.

There are many indicators of success as a place of learning, but one important indicator is learner demand. The success of an organisation will also be marked by the extent to which it serves the community – academically capable disabled people are an ordinary and integral part of the wider community of those seeking lifelong learning and training opportunities.

Minimise discrimination and avoid complaints

Implementing a DAP will make it far less likely that an educational organisation will inadvertently practice discrimination. A successful DAP with student engagement throughout the process will also act as an insurance policy against complaints.

Of course, not all discrimination is unlawful. The Human Rights Act states that discrimination will not be unlawful where, for example, the elimination of all discriminatory practices would be unreasonable in the circumstances for a person or organisation. Development of a DAP will ensure that, in the event of a complaint, the organisation concerned can be confident it has already considered complex issues like 'unjustifiable hardship' in partnership with disabled learners.

Meet government expectations

Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) provides that States Parties (in this case, New Zealand) shall ensure that persons with disabilities are able to access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education and lifelong learning without discrimination and on an equal basis with others. To this end, States Parties shall ensure that reasonable accommodation is provided to persons with disabilities. An entity providing the public function of tertiary courses or vocational training must deliver its services in a manner consistent with national and international legislation and obligations. Disabled people have a legitimate expectation of access to education on the same basis as their academically capable peers unless there is good and compelling reason for why it is not possible.

Creation of a DAP also supports New Zealand Government expectations under the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES). Developing and implementing a DAP, alongside the improvements in outcomes for disabled learners, gives effect to the TES – specifically Objective Two: Barrier free access.

3. Who should develop a DAP?

Having a disability-friendly tertiary organisation, where disabled people are welcomed, supported and empowered to achieve, has tangible benefits for learner and staff attraction and retention, as well as leading wider community change to ensure discrimination against disabled people is removed. The TEC strongly encourages development of DAPs by all TEC funded providers to ensure they are taking all possible steps to reduce discrimination against disabled people, including staff, learners and the wider community with whom they engage.

For Plans submitted for investment from 2023 onwards, DAPs must be developed and submitted as part of the Investment Plan by providers receiving \$5 million or more in funding from the TEC, who are submitting a full Plan (strategic intent). We will directly notify providers of any changes to this requirement.

If you have already submitted a DAP, you must submit a DAP progress update, as part of your proposed Plan.

The [Kia Ōrite Toolkit – A New Zealand Code of Practice to achieve an inclusive and equitable tertiary education environment for disabled learners](#) has been developed to support the creation and implementation of the DAP in all tertiary organisations. Chapter one of the toolkit outlines an implementation process which will guide your DAP development. We recommend you use this as a resource early in your DAP process.

4. How is the DAP expected to recognise disability?

For the purposes of this guidance we have used the New Zealand Disability Strategy definition of disability, which uses the social model of disability. The New Zealand Disability Strategy states that “disability is not something individuals have. What individuals have are impairments. They may be physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, learning or other impairments.”

Therefore, “disability is the process which happens when one group of people create barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have”.

We refer to disabled people or disabled learners, to make the point that people with impairments are often disabled by their environment. Disability is something that happens when people with impairments face barriers in society; it is society that disables, not an individual’s impairments. This occurs through negative attitudes, lack of physical, communication and information access, etc.

5. Disability Action Plans and employment policies

This requirement to have a DAP targets educational organisations as service providers, rather than as employers. However, while it is not essential for DAPs to include employment strategies, it makes sense to develop your DAP in association with a review of employment policies and practices and disabled staff as the DAP may also have benefits for them.

A good source of advice in this area is the - [Lead Toolkit - For employing disabled people - Ministry of Social Development \(msd.govt.nz\)](https://www.msd.govt.nz/lead-toolkit-for-employing-disabled-people).

6. Disability Action Plans and people from Māori, Pacific and non-English speaking backgrounds

Māori and Pacific disabled people, and those from non-English speaking Backgrounds, often encounter additional barriers in attempting to access services. Access is made difficult not only due to the impact of the person's disability or impairment, but also because services are not offered in a way that is culturally and/or linguistically appropriate.

Tertiary education organisations have developed significant expertise in ensuring cultural sensitivity in service provision, such as through the provision of culturally appropriate support and spaces for Māori and Pacific learners. This sensitivity will also be an important requirement of any initiatives to make your services more accessible for disabled people.

Tertiary education organisations will need to be mindful of these issues in developing a DAP.

B. Putting your Disability Action Plan into action

7. Kia Ōrite – your blueprint to developing your DAP

The DAP of a tertiary education organisation must show clear evidence that the provider uses the various processes and is measuring its progress against the Kia Ōrite Toolkit and the best practice standards described in.

The main resource that will support you to develop your DAP is the [Kia Ōrite Toolkit – A New Zealand code of practice to achieve an inclusive and equitable tertiary education environment for disabled learners](#).

Following extensive work with the tertiary sector in 2020 and early 2021, the **Kia Ōrite Toolkit** provides current, New Zealand-specific guidance to help you support disabled learners in your organisation. It includes management and learning support implementation toolkits to assist tertiary education organisations to implement of best practices and development of their DAP, covering all aspects of a learner's life.

The toolkit aims to assist all staff to become more 'disability confident' and managers and the wider institution to implement the toolkit and DAP. Frontline support staff (such as those currently supporting disabled learners) should not be expected to develop or drive the DAP – it is a plan requiring full engagement and commitment from all parts of your organisation.

Frontline student support staff should be seen as an internal resource to assist with the development of your DAP. They can offer ideas and give feedback about the different parts of the Management and Learning Support Implementation Toolkit and peer review the completion of different activities.

Another critical input for the DAP is the experience of disabled learners. It is essential that you implement it in partnership with disabled learners with different impairments, so they can give feedback about learning facilities (either campus or work-based), services and systems.

There are two components within the **Kia Ōrite Toolkit**:

- Management responsibilities, and
- Learning support responsibilities.

These are underpinned by critical implementation steps:

- The tertiary education organisation's council and senior management/ leadership team endorse the development and implementation of a DAP.
- A senior manager is chosen to drive and promote the development and implementation of a DAP, using the toolkit.
- A disability reference group is established involving staff from various parts of the organisation, disabled learners with different impairments and relevant community networks.
- They work with this senior manager to develop and implement a DAP, using the toolkit.

The **Kia Ōrite Toolkit** provides guidance on options for implementation:

- A team, including disabled learners, gradually works through the toolkit (the disability reference group).
- Look at what you can accomplish efficiently. Most people know where the greatest barriers for disabled learners are, so start there.
- Ask disabled learners what would make the biggest difference for them to brainstorm about barriers to success and possible actions for solutions.
- You don't have to review all areas of learner's activities in the first 12 months. Develop a three-year DAP and prioritise which areas you will focus on each year.

- Delegate parts of the toolkit to staff responsible for specific activities, for them to review and report back to the disability reference group.
- Remember that it's essential to get feedback from disabled learners with different impairments as part of this process.
- Staff within different faculties, departments or work-based learning sites can also review and implement parts of the toolkit that are relevant for disabled learners associated with their faculty or department.

Using the management and learning support implementation toolkits step-by-step actions:

- Choose an activity and answer the questions to find out if you have met the best practice standards for that activity. This may determine some actions that are required.
- Identify any barriers that exist for disabled learners with each activity, and solutions to resolve those barriers to participation and achievement of disabled learners.
- Develop some actions to assist you to meet these standards. The toolkit includes an action plan for each area or activity that can form the basis of your DAP.

The **Kia Ōrite Toolkit** also includes various ideas and resources to assist with the development of your DAP.

8. Ensuring the future of your Disability Action Plan

The DAP of a tertiary education organisation must evidence appropriate long-term commitment to the activities within the Plan.

Set an appropriate timeframe

Your DAP should have a three-year timeframe to allow for development, the activity to take place, and monitoring and assessment of outcomes. Plans should be reviewed annually, with reporting on progress to senior leadership and governance on a regular basis.

Develop policy

Incorporating the DAP into policy will ensure that commitment to it continues beyond the employment of a few key people and will inspire public confidence that the commitment is real rather than transitory. DAP policy will:

- demonstrate commitment to the DAP's objectives
- indicate the support of management for the initiative
- legitimise the allocation of resources to the implementation of the DAP.

International experience shows us the most effective DAPs are those which link clearly to a tertiary organisation's broader strategic vision and goals. This clear line of sight is a powerful tool to attract senior leadership and governance interest, as well as providing clear rationale for funding and resource requests to support DAP activities.

Integrate your Disability Action Plan

In the short term, it may be that a DAP will be a separate component of your organisation's strategic plan. However, over time the DAP should become part of your general approach to forward planning.

The DAP will become less of an independent strategy and more of a thread running through all organisation plans, including plans relating to capital works and property management, recruitment, academic programmes, learner needs, information technology, software procurement, library services and activities organised through the student union and other relevant associations.

Alternatively, the DAP may inform all decision making across the organisation from the outset. This will be a decision for each individual organisation.

Consider plans and policies which are being superseded

Ensure you plan to communicate the retirement of any old plans or processes that will be superseded by the DAP.

9. Promoting your Disability Action Plan

The DAP of a tertiary education organisation must include provisions relating to the promotion and championing of the plan.

If your organisation is to reap the full benefits of having a DAP it will need to market the plan effectively to current and potential disabled learners and service users. It will also have to involve people by offering them the opportunity to make suggestions about ways to improve the DAP.

Ensure information is publicly available

Access to the DAP and its implementation process will encourage a sense of ownership of the DAP among staff, learners and service users. This sense of ownership, of having a stake in the success of the plan, will encourage people to make contributions.

You must ensure the latest version (or draft in progress) of your DAP is available on public-facing web pages, clearly labelled, in accessible formats⁴ and easily found in search results. This is to ensure disabled learners and community stakeholders can understand your work and outcomes.

You must give a copy of your DAP to the TEC with your Investment Plan as part of this regular process. Providing your DAP to the TEC is a clear statement of your organisation's commitment to non-discriminatory practices. By reporting on progress towards DAP goals, for example through annual reports, evaluation reports and audits, an organisation can confirm and renew this commitment.

Establish grievance procedures

An effective grievance procedure encourages confidence in the DAP and facilitates feedback on ways it may be improved. It may also be an effective way of supporting learners to stay engaged with their learning through resolution of disputes at an early stage. Grievance procedures need to be publicised, quick and efficient, free of charge, dealt with by management and capable of delivering results.

10. Evaluating your Disability Action Plan

The DAP of a tertiary education organisation must include provisions relating to the means of evaluating the policies and programmes.

Without evaluation you will have no way of determining whether you are achieving your goals or whether your implementation programme is producing value for money and effort expended. Evaluation strategies should be developed in connection with goals, targets and timeframes.

⁴ www.digital.govt.nz/standards-and-guidance/nz-government-web-standards/web-accessibility-standard-1-1/

The success of an effective DAP may be shown by any number of changes such as:

- greater use of services by disabled members of the public
- increased numbers of disabled learners
- higher levels of academic achievement by disabled learners
- increased employment outcomes for disabled learner
- noticeable changes in staff understanding of disability discrimination issues
- improvements in the physical accessibility of education facilities.

Make a date to review your DAP after any evaluations, or to reconsider your strategies in light of your experiences in implementing the plan.

11. Communication and training

The DAP of a tertiary education organisation must include provisions relating to the communication of policies and programmes, and training to persons within the tertiary education organisation.

For the DAP to succeed you will need a team effort, for all staff to appreciate the value of successfully implementing a DAP and understand what they need to do to ensure success, you will need to work out ways to communicate the plan to staff.

Training in DAP responsibilities will need to be undertaken with all staff. The DAP must incorporate strategies for encouraging current and future staff to undertake training. In-house training provided by disability support and other staff must involve disabled learners and disabled staff members (if available) and must be resourced outside business as usual activities.

[The Accessibility Charter](#) is a useful tool to improve information and communication access across your organisation. Adopting the charter can help people to see the unintended barriers for disabled people to information and communication access and. You can describe your approach to addressing gaps for neurodiverse and disabled learners in your Disability Action Plan, if you have one.

The TEC will use the following assessment criteria, as prescribed in the current Gazette notice, to assess your DAP.

[Assessment] Criteria for TEOs submitting a DAP

Whether and to what extent the DAP:

- is consistent with best practice standards as described in the Kia Ōrite toolkit;
- provides for evaluation strategies and appropriate allocation of responsibility; and
- provides for communication of policies and programmes, goals and targets to support disabled learners.

The Gazette notice can be found here - <http://www.gazette.govt.nz/notice/id/2025-sl999>

C. Guidance for TEOs submitting a DAP progress update

This section provides guidance for tertiary education organisations (TEOs) completing a DAP progress update (DAP update) in 2025 for investment from 2026.

Who needs to submit a DAP update?

We require a DAP update from all TEOs that:

- are required to submit a full Investment Plan, and
- receive \$5 million or more in TEC on-Plan funding, and
- have already developed a DAP that was assessed with their previous Investment Plan.

The DAP update is an opportunity to update us on what you've done since you submitted your DAP.

DAP update template

The DAP update template consists of three main sections:

- Section 1 – progress update (what have you done, and what impact it had)
- Section 2 – lessons learnt (what was the impact of the interventions you tried, have they worked?)
- Section 3 – next steps (what are you doing next, and how are your next steps informed by the lessons learnt?)

We recommend you use the [DAP update template](#). Each section includes a number of sub-questions that provide guidance about what we expect you to report on. These are not exhaustive.

There is some overlap between sections (and sub-questions), so we will assess DAP updates holistically. Where there are similar/overlapping questions in different sections, we don't expect you to answer the question more than once.

The TEC will use the following criteria, as prescribed in the Gazette notice, to assess your DAP update.

[Assessment] Criteria for TEOs submitting a progress update against its DAP

Whether and to what extent the progress update demonstrates:

- satisfactory progress against the DAP (including what has been achieved);
- evidence about the impacts of the interventions;
- lessons learnt (including what has worked and what has not and why); and
- next steps (including how the lessons learnt will inform next steps, and any changes to the DAP as necessary).

These four overarching criteria map to the structure of the DAP update template. Further detailed guidance sits under these criteria.

The Gazette notice can be found here – <http://www.gazette.govt.nz/notice/id/2025-sl999>.

Section 1 – progress update

What we asked for

Please provide a progress update on what has been achieved against your DAP, including:

- What **outcomes have you achieved** so far from the implementation of your DAP (including how you are working with your learners and staff)?
- What **difference** has this made for learners? Provide evidence that your interventions are or are not having the intended impact.
- How have you **addressed gaps** of educational outcomes and lifted performance?
- How have you **monitored progress**?

What we expect to see (assessment guidance/criteria)

This section assesses the effectiveness and impact of the implementation of your DAP and the extent to which you've achieved your DAP goals, monitored progress, and made any relevant changes to your DAP. We're looking to see what progress you have made against your DAP: whether you've done what you said you were going to do, and whether it's made a difference.

Overall progress update narrative

A clear narrative that sets out the progress you have made in implementing your DAP.

Specific things you might include:

- What you've done and achieved since submitting the DAP. This might include details of specific initiatives or programmes trialled or implemented, with intended purpose/rationale, timelines and number of learners impacted.
- How does this compare to what you said you were going to do? Are the projects and initiatives from the DAP? If you've done something different, provide a good, clear reason.
- What specific changes have you made to your policies, processes etc?

Outcomes achieved

A clear description of impacts and outcomes of DAP implementation. Evidence to support the narrative might include data, reports, case studies and other relevant

documents that show the progress and impact of your DAP initiatives.

Specific things you should include where possible:

- Number of learners impacted
- Description of changes to policies
- Evidence of impacts, both qualitative and quantitative, eg case studies, individual learner stories.

Difference for learners

(Some of this might be included in the previous section [Outcomes achieved], but it could include more qualitative narratives.)

Specific things you might include:

- Learner journey stories of what has changed for them. This could include academic success or other aspects of their lives that have been impacted.
- As above, evidence of impacts, both qualitative and quantitative.

Addressing gaps of education outcomes

A clear description of any particular actions/initiatives you've undertaken to close the gaps in education outcomes. (This information might be covered in the update already. The DAP will set out a range of initiatives you will be doing to change/fix a range of issues across your organisation [and that's appropriate and necessary], but ultimately, we want to see changes to outcomes.)

Specific things we'd expect to see:

- Explicit links between initiatives and improvements to education outcomes.

Monitoring

A clear description of how you have monitored your DAP programme of work and the individual initiatives.

Specific things you might include:

- Questions asked and data collected
- Frequency of monitoring
- Who was responsible and accountable for monitoring
- Frequency of reporting (and to whom).

Section 2 – lessons learnt

What we asked for

Please provide lessons you have learnt, including what has worked and what has not, in relation to your DAP, including:

- What **interventions and initiatives** have you tried?
- Have you **evaluated** these? What has been the impact?
- What do the evaluations demonstrate about the **progress and impact**?
- What has **worked well**, and what are the main issues or areas of concern?

Please explain why the initiatives have or have not worked.

What we expect to see (assessment guidance/criteria)

This section assesses your experiences implementing your current DAP. We want evidence of lessons from both successes and failures, including understanding what didn't work and why.

Overall lessons learnt update

A clear description of the lessons learned from implementing the DAP and how you are intentionally using these to inform project changes and developments.

› **Interventions and initiatives**

Building on the description in the previous section as appropriate, what are the specific initiatives and projects that you have trialled and/or implemented?

› **Evaluation**

A description of whether, and when and how, you have evaluated specific projects and initiatives. This should include a clear explanation of what worked (including how this was measured) and why.

Specific things you might include:

- › Description of specific evaluation methodologies
- › Frequency of evaluation
- › Metrics used in evaluation.

› **What worked well, or issues and areas of concern**

Building on the description of the evaluation, more specific detail on the

projects/initiatives that worked well or didn't. We'd expect to see a clear understanding of the reasons behind the success or failure of projects/initiatives.

Specific things you might include:

- › A narrative demonstrating a good appreciation and understanding of why specific projects and interventions worked or not.
- › Use of specific planning tools such as intervention logic, theory of change or programme theory, which show expected outputs and outcomes of interventions.

Section 3 – next steps

What we asked for

Provide an overview of the next steps, including:

- What is the **next stage** of your DAP to be implemented?
- How are the **outcomes from previous work and lessons learnt** in implementing your DAP informing the next steps?
- What **changes, if any, are you making** to your DAP? Please explain why you are making these changes.

What we expect to see (assessment guidance/criteria)

This section assesses your forward-looking strategy as articulated in your DAP. This includes how well you have outlined the future and your ongoing journey towards achieving learner success.

Overall next steps update

Demonstration of your preparedness and strategic direction for ongoing and future success, based on your:

- outcomes and experiences from previous stages being used to inform future steps
- definitions of success for both the learners and the organisation.

Next stage

Description of what you are doing next to implement your DAP. We'd like to see details of projects/initiatives, with timelines, resourcing and measures of success.

Specific things you might include:

- How the next stage builds on previous work
- Whether it includes specific budget and resource committed to the work.

› Outcomes informing next steps

Description of how outcomes and evaluation of initiatives have been incorporated into the next phases of the learner success work.

Specific things you might include:

- Explicit statements such as “we trialled programme x in 2024. It worked/did

not work because of y. Based on this outcome we made z changes to the project, which will be rolled out in 2026.”

› **Changes to DAP**

If there are changes to the DAP, either proposed or already made, clearly flag these. We expect to see a logical explanation of why you have made (or proposed) the changes.

D. Summary

Diversity is fundamental to the ongoing sustainability of tertiary education. The successful implementation of a DAP will not only have a positive spin-off for disabled learners and staff but will also ensure tertiary education organisations are able to successfully target and support this significant demographic group of potential fee-paying students.

The DAP process is similar to any best practice approach to running your tertiary education organisation. It will fit comfortably with your organisation's objectives of pursuing academic excellence, maintaining a viable and prestigious place of learning, and ensuring that all goods, services and facilities are accessible to all members of the community.

Your key resource to support this work is the **Kia Ōrite Toolkit**. It will support you as you strive at all times to create a responsive, diverse and inclusive environment for engaged, diverse and capable disabled learners.