Ōritetanga
Learner
Success

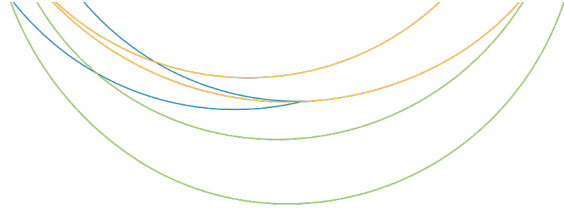**Tertiary Education
Commission**
Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua

Disability Action Plans 2022

A report back to the tertiary education sector

Improving outcomes for disabled learners

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) wants to encourage and support tertiary education organisations (TEOs) to take a strong and proactive approach to improving outcomes for disabled learners/ākonga whaikaha. To support this, in September 2021 we introduced a new Investment Plan requirement of Disability Action Plans (DAPs) for organisations that receive over $5 million in TEC funding. DAPs are an important tool that enable TEOs to evidence their support of disabled learners.

We want to ensure TEOs' practices avoid discrimination against disabled people, and disabled learners experience better outcomes across their education journey. A DAP helps TEOs to identify good practices and offers a blueprint for change. The DAP sits alongside other Investment Plan requirements, including Learner Success Plans, that aim to improve outcomes for historically underserved learner groups.

Introducing DAPs in the Investment Round for 2023 funding is part of the Government's move to ensure TEOs meet their responsibilities under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Creating and implementing a DAP, and improving outcomes for disabled learners, will also help TEOs give effect to the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) – specifically Objective Two: Barrier free access.

To help TEOs develop a DAP, TEC issued DAP Guidance, which outlines what we expect from TEOs in terms of developing and implementing a DAP. Unlike Learner Success Plans, there is no set template for DAPs; instead, the guidance supports development of a DAP specific to each TEO, and gives suggestions on using the Kia Ōrite Toolkit (Kia Ōrite: Achieving Equity – The New Zealand Code of Practice for an Inclusive Tertiary Education Environment for Students with Impairments). The toolkit encourages a whole-of-organisation approach for implementing the DAP.

We advised TEOs that they could submit a draft DAP in 2022, due to the limited time to develop it and engage with learners (which is one of the key pillars of the DAP work).

This report provides a summary of key themes from the DAPs and some guidance to support ongoing good DAP development for TEOs and those supporting their mahi with disabled learners.
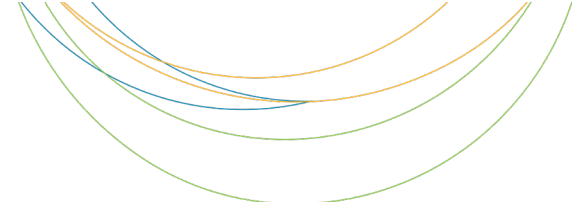
Investment Round for 2023 funding – Panel assessment of DAPs

As the DAP requirement was new for the Investment Round for 2023 funding, TEC appointed an independent Panel to support assessment. The Panel analysed DAP submissions in order to give TEOs individual feedback, and to produce this report for the wider tertiary sector and other interested organisations.

Panel membership

The Panel comprised:

> an Australian disability expert with more than 45 years of experience in the disability service/teaching and education space, lived experience of disability and extensive experience with creating and monitoring DAPs in Australian TEOs

> a NZ-based tertiary expert with more than 30 years' experience in teaching and online delivery in vocational education, and strong experience in learner support

> the Co-president of the National Disabled Students Association, who has lived experience of disability and is a recent university learner

> a TEC staff member with lived experience of disability and a disability advocacy background

> a TEC staff member with lived experience of disabled whānau.

This year TEC received 20 DAPs from a potential total of 23 TEOs expected to submit. Eighteen of these were received on time and assessed by the Panel.

Panel findings and recommendations

The TEC and the DAP Panel would like to thank all TEOs that submitted a DAP as part of their Investment Plan for funding in 2023. Overall, the Panel acknowledged there was a short timeframe to produce a DAP, but was heartened to see a willingness to identify gaps in current capabilities and a move towards improving the experiences of disabled learners.
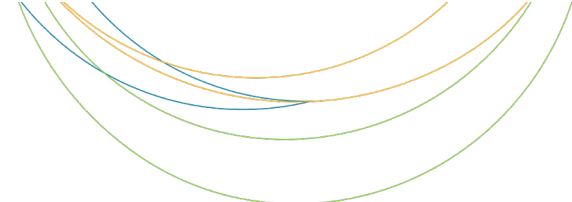
While providers are at differing stages of developing their DAPs, the Panel found some common themes to help guide the ongoing DAP development process. These include:

> data

> learner voice

> stakeholder participation

> governance and resourcing

> evaluation and monitoring

> staff development

> promotion

> Kia Ōrite use

> attitude and language.

The following provides a summary and advice for DAP development against each theme.
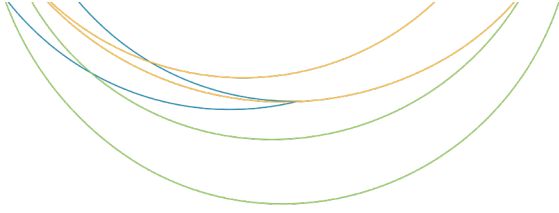
Data on ākonga whaikaha

Data was one of the less developed areas of the DAPs reviewed by the Panel. Some providers were uncertain what information they should be collecting. Others reflected they do not know how to effectively use the data they do have.

We would like to see qualitative and quantitative data used together to illustrate the learner journey through a TEO. Ideally this will help identify disabled learners' specific issues in tertiary learning and how TEOs can target services to accommodate these needs.

To collect good qualitative data, TEOs need to engage with **all** learners, understand their needs around their studies, and compare different groups' responses. Questions could focus on how learners get to classes, do they work as well as study, what is the best way to access class materials, and do learners have difficulties with any of these? You may find that if all learners have difficulty accessing your campus or online material, disabled learners will be significantly more impacted.

To collect good quantitative data, consider information collected on enrolment and from learners accessing services. Knowing what services are being accessed and whether learners identify as disabled will help you recognise areas that may need more resourcing to better support learners. Stronger DAPs identified disabled cohorts, and could set equity targets for these groups. Some DAPs were able to identify learners with mental health support needs – an area where learners are seeking more assistance.

Some TEOs indicated they had no, or low numbers of, disabled learners (though some were unsure, as they did not collect this data). TEOs whose data suggests this should investigate why. While it might be due to the field of study, it could also highlight barriers that they are unaware of and need to remove.

We remind TEOs that the Single Data Return (SDR) collects disability status and use of disability support services. TEOs can use this to get a feel for baselines, identify gaps in information and prioritise areas for gathering qualitative information.

Learner voice and participation in DAP development

DAPs we received showed varying levels of learner voice and participation. Some providers were unsure how to involve learners in the decision-making process. We strongly encourage providers to review the Whiria Ngā Rau framework published by the student union associations. We are also happy to introduce DAP leads to the National Disabled Students Association (NDSA) to encourage the growth of partnerships.

While a strong number of TEOs had involved learners in their DAP Working and Reference Groups, we want to encourage TEOs to use learner voice proactively, rather than just reviewing options in a "take-it-or-leave-it" fashion. To effectively and efficiently meet learner needs, work in partnership with learners from the start. This approach also aligns with the disabled community motto of "Nothing about us, without us". Also, don't take learner input into DAPs for granted – recognise and compensate for time.

Learners also need to have their complaints heard, treated with care, and acted upon. While it seems that all providers have appropriate complaints processes, these need to include transparent decision-making practices after a complaint has been made, to demonstrate accountability and build learners' trust. Proper management of complaints processes is also an important part of the Tertiary and International Learners Code of Practice.

Wider stakeholder participation (eg, staff and support agencies)

The Panel was pleased that a few DAPs showed a willingness to consult with disability experts/organisations where the provider felt their own knowledge and understanding was lacking. By actively seeking community input, providers can better support their learners; this kind of partnership approach helps raise the provider's capability and builds trust.

Good practice included involvement in communities of practice and creating spaces for ongoing input from experts and those directly involved with course delivery – whether through regular meetings or membership of advisory panels.

Governance and resourcing (personnel and budget)

Overall, DAPs indicated that organisations had a strong willingness for the DAP process to succeed. Most DAPs had vision statements indicating their longer-term goals for disabled learners. In some DAPs, Senior Leadership Teams or Boards of Directors endorsed the proposed work plans. At some TEOs members of the governance group directly oversaw the DAP development, sometimes supported by a new or to-be-appointed manager with a direct reporting line. Stronger
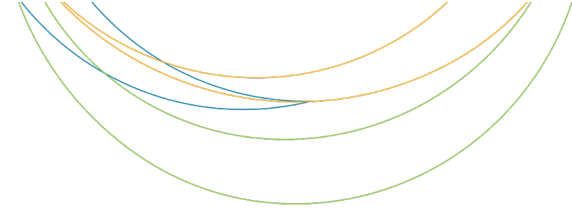
DAPs identified the teams that would lead the workstreams identified by the DAP Working Group for their organisation.

The Panel strongly encourages providers not to rely heavily on existing disability support services when implementing their DAP. These services are often underfunded and understaffed, so relying on them may prevent a TEO from meeting its goals within the planned timeframe. Also, using disability support services staff to develop DAPs does not foster inclusive practices and may take staff away from their primary function of providing services to disabled learners.

The Panel also noted that very few DAPs were at the stage of development where they were able to provide a cost analysis of or committed budget to proposed work plans. This was not unexpected given the short timeframe. Moving forward, we expect budgeting allocations to be part of any formal DAP update.

Evaluation and monitoring

Many DAPs clearly defined allocation of responsibilities and monitoring mechanisms, and set up new reporting pathways so the Senior Leadership Team and Board members were aware of progress. Stronger DAPs provided timelines of expected completion dates of current capability reviews and when key decisions (such as staff appointments, future engagements with learners and wider stakeholders) would be made. Most DAPs followed the TEC recommendation of a three-year plan cycle and aligning development with their wider Learner Success Plan.

An area for development in most DAPs is the ongoing evaluation of work plans. This would make planned monitoring processes more effective. Many DAPs stated that parity or best practice is the ultimate target for their work plans. However, it is unclear what the interim targets between current capability and the target (in a given timeframe) are, and what will be viewed as successful. Only one provider stated they have an equity target of reducing the parity gap of course completion by 0.5% p.a. over three years.

We acknowledge that setting these targets takes time, especially if the provider is still in the process of understanding their current capabilities and disabled learner cohort outcomes. However, in future DAPs we would like to see TEOs identify where they want to get to, and interim targets if needed.

Staff development/training

Staff personal development plans is an area that was well addressed across the DAPs. We are pleased this is an area of focus for providers as improving all staff members' disability capability is a solid foundation to build trust with disabled learners and reduce barriers to their education.

Several TEC-funded resources for staff capability were released in 2022 and early 2023. Co-created with subject matter experts and disabled and neurodiverse learners, these include guidance on supporting learners with autism and ADHD, a suite of training material for general disability confidence and teaching with Universal Design for Learning (UDL). See Resources to help support your learners – Tertiary Education Commission (tec.govt.nz).

Promotion of DAPs

While we realise that promotion of DAPs depends on the stage of development, only a few plans actively promote the DAP once finalised. We require TEOs to make DAPs available to all current and prospective learners in accessible formats as this helps foster trust and accountability, and helps clarify expectations between the provider and learner.

Evidence of use of Kia Ōrite Toolkit

The Panel and TEC are very pleased to see a strong and committed approach to the principles and framework of the Kia Ōrite Toolkit in most DAPs. Some DAPs provided a detailed gap analysis, which has helped providers begin to form work plans to address gaps between their capabilities and their goals of best practice.

One DAP broke down each component of the toolkit and graded themselves as Beginning/Developing, Proficient/Functioning or Accomplished/Exemplary, acknowledging that they did not consider themselves Accomplished/Exemplary under any component. The Panel viewed this display of insight as helping the provider identify where to create work plans to set realistic targets to support implementation, to reduce barriers across the organisation.
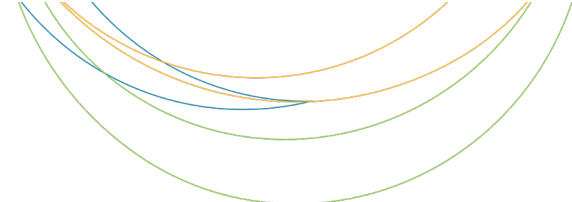
Attitude/language use

All DAPs showed an understanding of the importance of developing a DAP. Most DAPs used mana-enhancing language with a focus of ākonga at the centre. We would like to reinforce that the provider reflects their learners, staff and community, and has the responsibility to support stakeholders to make their voices heard – especially when they are advocating for reasonable accommodations, and the removal of unjustifiable barriers.

So, what happens now?

The TEC will continue to work closely with the sector to support development of the next rounds of Disability Action Plans. We will add to our capability-building resources, with material about supporting Māori and Pacific disabled learners to the Kia Ōrite toolkit in 2023.

To ensure momentum in this work, for 2023, providers who receive over $5 million in TEC funding will be requested to submit a Disability Action Plan, whether or not they are due to submit an Investment Plan. Please talk to your TEC relationship manager for more detail.

The TEC and the Panel were encouraged by the quality of DAPs developed so far. We recognise each TEO is at different stages on their own path to articulating and implementing a DAP. Ensuring that disabled learners are valued as participants, acknowledged for their input, and included in all stages of this process will further strengthen the DAPs.

We will continue to partner with TEOs and disabled learners to facilitate further DAP development and positive outcomes for disabled learners across the tertiary education system.

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