

2021 Equity funding for tertiary students with disabilities – Tertiary Education Institutions data reporting

Introduction

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) has collected information from Tertiary Education Institutions¹ (TEIs) about their use of the TEC fund, *equity funding for students with disabilities*², since 2018. This information is used to support work being undertaken by TEC and the Ministry of Education (MoE), to improve outcomes for disabled learners across the tertiary sector. The data is collected through the ‘Equity funding: Tertiary students with disabilities’ reporting template, which captures various types of learner and resourcing information, such as costs, staff numbers, services provided, learners accessing the services, challenges faced by TEIs, etc.

The collection of this data is very important, as it supports work being undertaken by the TEC and the MoE to improve outcomes for disabled learners in the tertiary sector. In particular, the detailed information provided by those TEIs who reported Challenges, Highlights and Successes with their disabled learners is helping inform work on the Unified Funding System. It will also continue to be reviewed in regards to additional resource content needs for *The Kia Ōrite Toolkit – A New Zealand code of practice to achieve an inclusive and equitable tertiary education environment for disabled learners*.

In March 2022, TEC requested data from all 27 TEIs on their use of *equity funding for tertiary students with disabilities* for the 2021 funding year. The 2021 reporting template was consistent with templates used in previous years, with an expanded standardised list of the disability support services available at each TEI. It was therefore possible to compare responses across the years, with some new insights about the support services each TEI provides.

The quality and depth of data received for the 2021 reporting round improved again on the 2020 round, as more providers supplied more complete reports. This is enabling us to build a clearer picture of the supports provided for, and constraints on support for disabled learners.

We encourage all TEI’s to review the report, and consider how the issues and learnings detailed here might inform your [Disability Action Plan](#) development.

¹ TEIs include Universities, Te Pūkenga subsidiaries and Wānanga.

² While the fund being reported on is called “*Equity funding for tertiary students with disabilities*”, the appropriate term for learners supported by this fund is ‘disabled learners’. This is reflected in the paper. Where the paper refers to the fund, it is italicised for clarity.

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2021 equity funding for disabled learners

This year, all 27 TEIs returned³ completed reports. Overall, they received a total of \$5,414,772 in *equity funding for students with disabilities* from TEC⁴. The equity funding received by each TEI ranged from \$8,196 to \$831,859. The large variation was due to the equity funding calculation, which is calculated as the Equivalent Full Time Student (EFTS) number from the Mix of Provision of each TEI multiplied by a standard dollar rate.

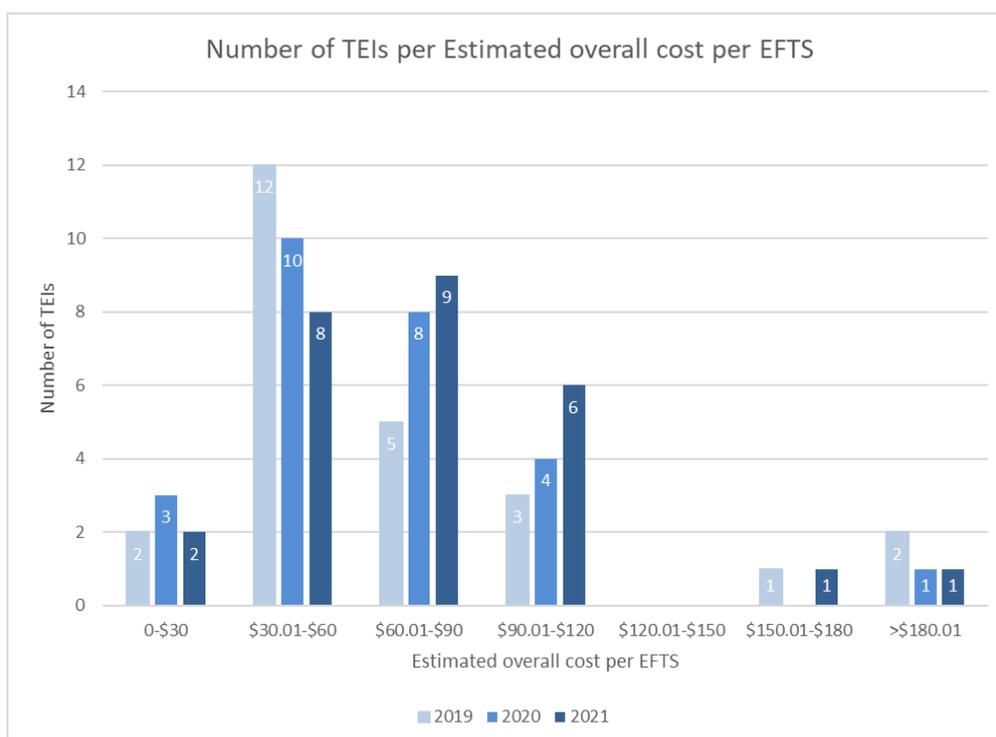
TEIs were asked to report the estimated overall costs of providing support services for disabled learners, including but not limited to TEC equity funding for 2021. All TEIs provided this information. The total cost across these providers was \$13,812,009 ranging from \$10,000 to over \$2.3 million.

Twenty-five TEIs reported spending more than the TEC equity funding allocation while supporting their disabled learners, with 18 TEIs spending more than double the amount they had received from the TEC. The TEC is heartened to see the significant efforts made by some TEOs in providing services to their learners with disabilities.

The overall cost per EFTS ranged from \$19/EFTS to \$198/EFTS in 2021, with most TEIs ranging between \$30 and \$90. The graph below shows the number of TEOs within different ranges of estimated overall cost per EFTS in the past 3 years.

³ In 2020, 26 TEIs returned the report and in 2019, 25 TEIs returned the report

⁴ In 2020, 27 TEIs received a total of \$5,427,010 in *equity funding for students with disabilities* from TEC.



Note: caution is advised when comparing figures as each organisation’s financial systems collate information in different ways. For example, some TEIs reported staff costs only (for staff directly supporting disabled learners as their primary role), others included both staff and resource costs, while others included components, but not all, of both staff and resources. TEC is also aware some TEIs reported figures which were too low to cover the services that are known to be provided at these organisations (potentially an outcome of internal financial coding systems).

Staff support for disabled learners

TEIs were asked to report the number of staff FTE who directly supported disabled learners. Alternatively, if there was no specifically assigned staff, TEIs were asked to record the number of general staff who could assist with disability-related support requests. Note that caution is advised when comparing figures between TEIs, as organisations structure their support services in very different ways.

The reported number of staff who directly support disabled learners ranged from one to 28.82 FTEs. A higher number of FTE reported tended to include the numbers of staff who supported learners with disabilities in some aspect of the role, rather than the number of staff primarily dedicated to supporting learners with disabilities. Some TEIs included paid note-takers and mentors in their data, however others did not.

Taking generic pool staff out of the data set (i.e. removing staff that were not directly supporting learners with disabilities), TEIs reported an average of around four FTEs directly supporting disabled learners. Larger TEIs tended to have larger teams solely involved in supporting disabled learners (5 – 12 FTE’s), while smaller TEIs reported less dedicated staff (1 – 3 FTEs) and relied more on wider staff support roles.

Total number of learners accessing disability services

TEIs were asked to provide the number of learners who accessed disability services in 2021, reporting each learner only once even if they accessed multiple services/ times.

The number of learners accessing services ranged from zero to 2,516 learners. Larger TEIs tended to report larger numbers of learners accessing disability services. However, as with other data categories, caution should be taken when comparing data between TEIs as data collection practices differ. The learner counts can represent different learner groups, depending on how data is captured at each organisation. For example, some TEIs counted only learners *registered* with disability support services at the TEI, or only learners whose interaction with disability support led to a *dollar cost*, while others included all learners that had any interaction with disability support services.

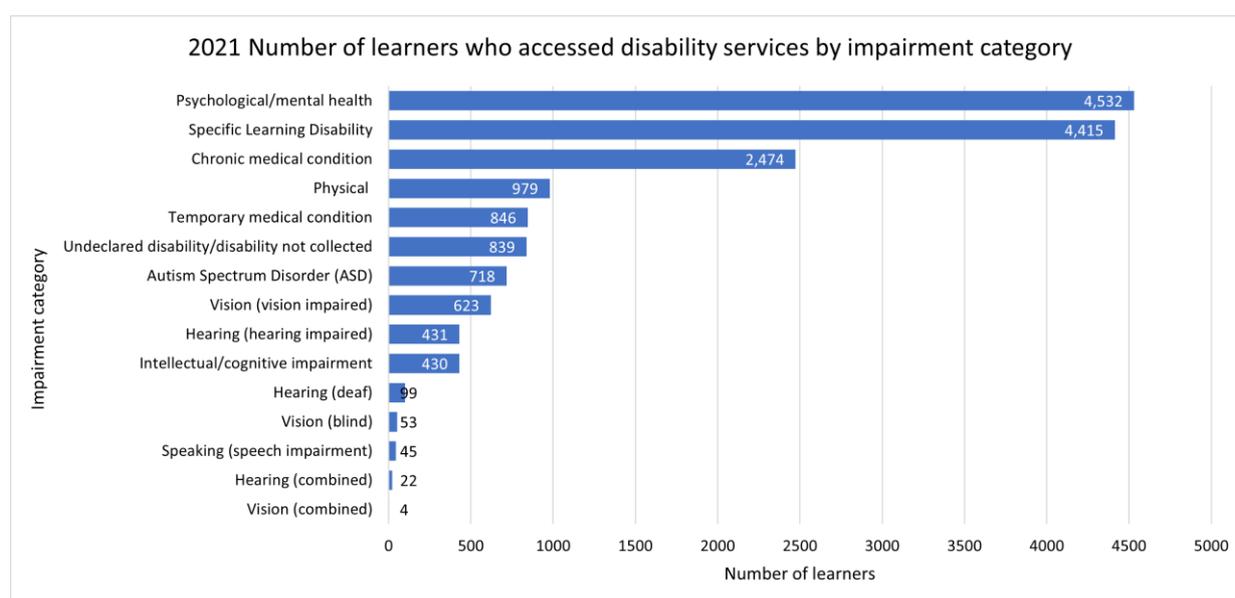
Waitlists and wait times for support from disability services

One TEI reported having a waitlist of 3.5 weeks for students with specific learning disabilities for screening and/or assessment for learning support. They reported having 25 learners on the waitlist in 2020 and 2021. Two other TEIs reported having a waitlist of one week, with one of these outlining that “the average wait time in the busiest period (Jan-Mar) was 6.3 working days”. None of the other TEIs reported having a waitlist. However, three TEIs reported their students had experienced a wait time of 1-2 weeks for an appointment with a disability advisor at the beginning of the semester/trimester. Two TEIs also reported that wait times increased during peak Covid-19 activity.

Distribution of learner counts across various impairment categories

TEIs were asked to report on the number of learners accessing services, and the disability reported by those learners from a standardised list of impairment categories.

One TEI reported that no learners accessed their disability services. Among the TEIs that provided learner numbers, the percentage of learners accessing disability services ranged from 1.0% to 21.8% of the total number of learners within each TEI. The figure below shows the number of learners who accessed disability services by impairment category.



The impairment categories with the highest number of learners were *psychological/mental health* (4,532 learners), followed by *specific learning disability* (4,415 learners). For some TEIs a learner can be in more than one category. Therefore, the total percentage per TEI can be greater than 100% of the reported number of disabled learners. Overall, the numbers of learners in each impairment category in 2021 were similar to 2020. The three exceptions were *psychological/mental health* (which increased from 3,386 learners in 2020 to 4,532 learners in 2021), *chronic medical condition* (which saw an increase from 1,966 learners in 2020 to 2,474 learners in 2021) and *specific learning disability* (which saw an increase from 3,649 learners in 2020 to 4,415 learners in 2021).

Some TEIs provided additional comments, mainly regarding how their numbers had changed in 2021 in comparison to 2020. Several reported significant increases in mental health and chronic health conditions. Challenges remain with the coding of impairments, and with some learner's reluctance to disclose certain impairments.

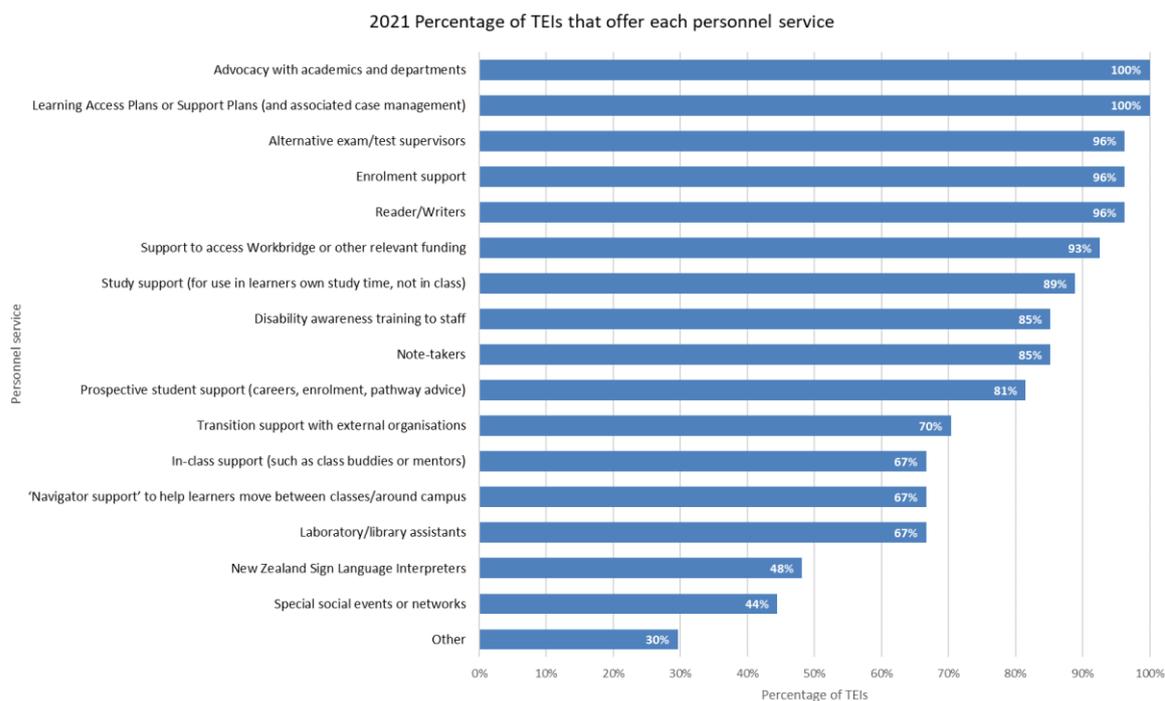
One TEI commented that their students accessing supported learning courses are supported by the Special Supplementary Grant (SSG) funding and are not registered with Disability Services as a result. TEC is uncertain whether this is common for all supported learning enrolments across TEI's⁵ (we are following up on this), but if so, it will affect overall numbers of learners accessing disability support.

TEC notes the ongoing challenges TEI's face to ensure learners feel safe to disclose disability at a time and level which enables appropriate support to be provided. We appreciate the ongoing work TEI's undertake to ensure that learners are aware of their services, especially in the growing area of need for mental health supports.

Personnel services provided for disabled learners

TEIs were asked to report on personnel services provided for disabled learners from a standardised list of services. Some TEIs indicated some services were not applicable to them. The figure below shows the percentage of TEIs offering personnel services, excluding any not applicable responses.

⁵ Note only some parts of Te Pūkenga receive SSG funding.

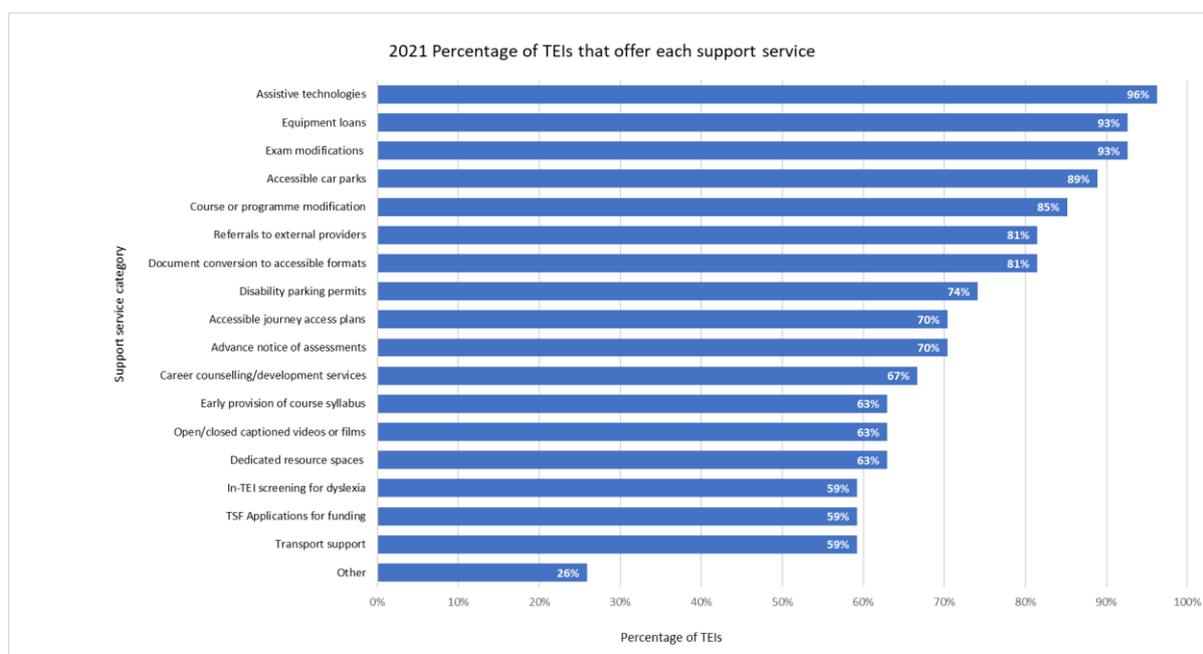


The top personnel disability services, offered by over 90% of TEIs, were *advocacy with academics and departments*, *Learning Access Plans or Support Plans* (offered by all TEIs, 100%), *alternative exam/test supervisors*, *enrolment support*, *reader/writers* (96%), and *support to access Workbridge* (93%).

The personnel disability services offered by the fewest TEIs were *NZ sign language interpreters* (48%), *special social events or networks* (44%) and *other* (30%). Several TEIs noted some services listed were available to all learners, not only those who identified as disabled.

Support services provided for disabled learners

TEIs were asked to report on support services provided for disabled learners from a standardised list of services. Some TEIs left some of the support service fields blank or indicated these were not applicable. The figure below shows the percentage of TEIs offering support services, excluding any not applicable responses.



The top support disability services, offered by over 90% of the TEIs, were *assistive technologies* (96%), *equipment loans* (93%) and *exam modifications* (93%).

The bottom three support disability services offered were *TSF (technology support funding) applications for funding* (59%), *transport support* (59%), and *In-TEI screening for dyslexia* (59%).

Note TEIs were asked to state whether they provided each service specifically for disabled learners. Some TEIs have therefore not recorded services provided when these services were available to all learners, even though they were available to disabled learners.

In addition to the standardised list, TEIs were asked if they provided any other services. Four TEIs provided details of other support services. These were:

- Irlens screening
- Modifications to the physical environment to support the needs of disabled learners (learning and accommodation spaces)
- Sensory support in dedicated spaces for part of the 2021 reporting year
- Auckland Transport support letter for student concession rates
- Online support – particularly for distance learners and during Covid-19 lockdowns
- Special tutorial class for students with anxiety / sensory issues in first year core courses
- Support with limited full time and disability allowance applications to StudyLink
- Internal referrals to health, counselling, and wellbeing services, learning and development support, financial and hardship assistance, and cultural support
- 151 students accessing peer mentors

Need for additional support

Nineteen TEIs provided information on the additional services they would like to provide learners with disabilities, but could not due to resource constraints. The main services these TEIs wished to provide included the following:

- Assistive Technology specialist and equipment (9 TEIs)
- Mentors, advisors, pastoral care facilities (11 TEIs)
- Assessments and Screenings (8 TEIs) - these include SLD diagnostic assessment, Educational Psychologist assessments, Dyslexia screening
- Dedicated workspace (3 TEIs)
- NZSL interpreters (3 TEIs)
- Support and equipment for neurodiverse learners (2 TEIs)
- Greater accessibility to Māori and Pasifika counsellors and other health care practitioners (2 TEIs)
- Open/Closed captions on media (1 TEI)

TEIs noted that cost constraints and a lack of human resources remain the primary factors preventing them from providing these services.

Challenges faced

Twenty-six TEIs described the main challenges facing them in regards to supporting disabled learners in 2021.

Most of the challenges recorded related to impacts of the COVID-19 lockdown/s. These included:

- A sudden need to switch to online lectures was challenging for many disabled learners, including challenges with technology access at home
- Mental distress and anxiety in learners, especially those with pre-existing mental health challenges, autism and ADHD
- Increase in the number of learners seeking support in semester 2. This increased the need for disability services supports compared to previous years
- Rise in demand for assistive technology
- Difficulty making contact with some students
- After the COVID-19 lockdown, a number of students required support to apply for resits, extensions and how to withdraw
- Providing reader/writer services became difficult
- Students being unable to study at home due to caring responsibilities, financial constraints and community commitments
- Open entry criteria for Level 1-4 qualifications resulted in an increase in students with very high needs and complex disabilities enrolled in courses they may find initially challenging. Needed to work closely with internal teams and Schools to effectively transition these students on the right pathway in order to succeed.

In addition, other challenges mentioned included:

- Rise in mental health disclosures
- High incidence of students presenting with dyslexia
- Students not disclosing disability on enrolment then needing support at short notice
- Student demographics at many TEIs are reflecting increasingly complex combinations of health and disability issues.

Initiatives recently developed to support disabled learners

Twenty-four TEIs described recent initiatives developed to support disabled learners. Examples of the initiatives included:

- Completion of a high-level disability strategy. This involved the creation of a disability expert panel which will hopefully expand into a disabled learner reference group or advisory group.
- Launch of a new equity scholarship to support learners with disabilities
- Upskilling and providing further education to staff on working with disabled learners. One TEI had over 200 teaching staff participate in several workshops that introduce specific learning Disabilities, UDL, inclusive teaching, Assistive Technology, and alternative assessment.
- Improvement of the re-enrolment process - learners were offered a range of ways to engage with disability services to confirm support for the following academic year.
- Proactively checking in on self-identified disabled learners during and following the lock down period.
- Staff members were funded to train as a SPELD assessor (for identification of dyslexia)
- More extensive communication and focus on mental health awareness week through social media platforms and events.
- More learning materials being made available online.
- Building and strengthening relationships with relevant external stakeholders. This includes the Ministry of Social Development, who can connect students with paid employment and internship.
- Programs to help transition future learners into the tertiary environment.
- Changed the name of the Disability Services team to Accessibility Services. The term 'accessibility' was identified as more mana enhancing for those using the service and focused on enhancing access to education by making the environment more accessible and inclusive.
- Improved online systems for contacting and booking appointments with health services.
- Implementation of various assistive technologies.
- Improvements to reporting systems to better capture impairment data, including a separate reportable field on ADHD which has been a fast-growing support area.
- Started mentoring services to support learners who are on the Autism Spectrum, those with brain injuries, mental health conditions and ADHD
- Recruitment of specialist staff members, including a staff member dedicated to supporting Māori with disabilities, a staff member fluent in NZSL, and several NZSL communicators/interpreters to provide support to Deaf students.
- Recruitment of a Digital Inclusion Coordinator to ensure students with disabilities are as digital savvy as possible and to assist with ensuring services are sustainable and scalable.
- The provision of Otter as a transcription/notetaking support for students was well received, enabling students to transition to independent notetaking.
- Uptake in TextHelp reader/writer software has increased by over 1000%.
- Creating and accessing accessible formats for students with print disabilities
- Supporting and demonstrating lecturers to record sessions
- Training and demonstrations, one-on-one, to help students adapt their devices to their learning, looking at student's device settings, Office 365 toolset and third-party apps
- Disability Awareness initiatives that were well attended by both staff and students, and we were proud to offer a workshop for medical students with a focus on New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) and Braille.
- Created a sensory hub in the student hub, it has been widely utilised since it's establishment.
- Collaborated with academic staff to ensure all online classes had captions and recording capabilities. This also created an opportunity to transcribe recordings into notes during lockdown
- Increase in number of students disclosing their disability as part of the enrolment process which allowed the team to put in place early intervention support. This also ensures proactive approach to engagement and retention

- Disability Services procured clear masks to support students with hearing impairments with on-campus classes and in accessing key services when masks are required or being widely used.

A large number of new initiatives were reported by TEIs for the 2021 teaching year. Many of those introduced as a response to the move to online learning have been adopted as BAU by the institutions. The on-going commitment and care shown by TEI staff was highlighted in many of the initiatives, particularly those involving outreach or increased pastoral care systems. The TEC recognises this has placed a very high burden on many support staff, and we acknowledge the dedication of these staff to supporting disabled learners.

If TEIs wish to know more about any of these initiatives, please contact the Ōritetanga Learner Success team at the TEC – we can link you with the relevant TEI for information / support⁶.

Highlights/successes in supporting disabled learners

Twenty-four TEIs described highlights or successes in supporting disabled learners in 2021. These included:

- Development of a disability strategy
- Continuous development of mentoring services
- An assistive technology trial to support note taking in class was successful and resulted in increased licences being purchased and being offered to a wider group of learners.
- Online dyslexia testing with distance students and online exam support
- Increase in the availability of assistive technology and the number of students accessing it
- Established a blended-delivery service for students with disabilities to access disability support via multiple platforms
- Online delivery continues to be well supported
- Continuing to collaborate with academic staff to ensure all online classes have captions and recording capabilities turned on and saved
- Increase in number of students disclosing their disability as part of the enrolment process
- The introduction of Glean note taking software has proven successful for learners who utilise it.
- Improvement of enrolment process has encouraged greater number of learners to disclose their disability.
- Opening of a new and enhanced study and resource room for students with disabilities.

We were heartened to hear that TEIs are continuing to improve their case management and wider support services and structures for disabled learners. The ongoing focus on using data tracking to both identify disabled learner outcomes, and target supports, is also very important and it's great to see this continuing to develop.

As we noted in the 2019 data report, better data on disabled people's current position and outcomes is key focus for the NZ Disability Action Plan, so continuing development in this area remains important. It is also positive to see staff capability remain a focus area, with some interesting new resource developments to support staff understanding and practice.

The detailed information collected in this report continues to be essential to informing work being undertaken by TEC and the Ministry of Education. It is helping inform work on the Unified Funding

⁶ You can reach the team via the Customer Contact Group on 0800 601 301, or customerservice@tec.govt.nz, put 'Equity Funding for disabled students reporting' in your subject line.

System and conversations around a need for potential additional funding for high investment learners. It will also continue to be reviewed in regards to additional resource content needs for *The Kia Ōrite Toolkit – A New Zealand code of practice to achieve an inclusive and equitable tertiary education environment for disabled learners*.

If TEIs wish to know more about any of these initiatives, please contact the Ōritetanga Learner Success team at the TEC – we can link you with the relevant TEI for information / support⁷.

Next steps for equity funding for disabled learners reporting work...

Cross sector work

The TEC will continue to work with TEOs, disability support services, disability advocate bodies and disabled learners to understand the constraints on the system and provide support and advice to TEO's to help them best support their learners.

2021 reporting

Reporting for the 2021 year will help TEC and MOE better understand the impacts of the second year of Covid-19, and what extra support the sector may need as a result. We will continue to report back to the sector to help share initiatives and successes.

As we develop more consistent data from this reporting cycle, we will be able to have a better picture of where disabled learners are attending TEIs, and how they are being supported.

Planning for 2023 and beyond

The TEC is currently considering how we could collect data around presence and support of disabled learners in PTEs and industry training. We hope to consult on this this in late 2021.

We are also considering changes to the reporting requirements for 2022 data onwards, to reflect the introduction of the Unified Funding System (UFS). We will be consulting with the sector on this once UFS design is completed.

Support for the sector

The *Kia Ōrite Toolkit – A New Zealand code of practice to achieve an inclusive and equitable tertiary education environment for disabled learners*

The Kia Ōrite toolkit is a key part of the TEC's commitment to support disabled learners. The Toolkit supports TEOs to standardise their practices, learn from each other, and understand what is expected from learners and their whanau. The Kia Ōrite development team will continue to add to the toolkit with additional training and resource material in the pipeline for late 2021 onwards.

⁷ You can reach the team via the Customer Contact Group on 0800 601 301, or customerservice@tec.govt.nz, put 'Equity Funding for disabled students reporting' in your subject line.