Tertiary Education Commission
Te Amorangi Mātauranga Matua

Tertiary education organisations data reporting

2023 Services and Supports for Disabled Learners[1]

Introduction

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) collects information from tertiary education organisations (TEOs) about the services and supports they provide to disabled learners. Some of this support is funded through the TEC fund *Equity funding for students with disabilities*.[2] TEC has collected this information from tertiary education institutions (TEIs[3]) since 2018. In 2024 we extended this collection to cover all TEOs that are required to produce a Disability Action Plan (ie, all TEOs that receive over $5 million in TEC funding). The data now includes information from the larger private training establishments (PTEs). This expansion will enable us to get a better view of system supports across the entire sector and understand learner need.

The information collected is used to support work being undertaken by the TEC and the Ministry of Education (MoE) to improve outcomes for disabled learners across the tertiary sector. The data is collected through the Services and Supports for Disabled Learners reporting template, which captures various types of learners and resourcing information, such as costs, staff numbers, services provided, learners accessing the services, challenges faced by TEOs, etc.

The collection of this data is 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 TEOs who reported challenges, highlights and successes with their disabled learners helps with informing future needs work. 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 2024, we requested data from 45 TEOs on their Services and Supports for Disabled Learners for the 2023 funding year. We encourage all TEOs to review the report, and consider

[1] This report was formerly called the "Equity Funding for tertiary students with disabilities" report.
[2] While the fund some TEOs received funding from 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.
[3] TEIs include universities, Te Pūkenga and wānanga. We have counted each Te Pūkenga business division separately instead of counting Te Pūkenga as one organisation.

how the issues and lessons detailed here might inform the development and implementation of your Disability Action Plan.

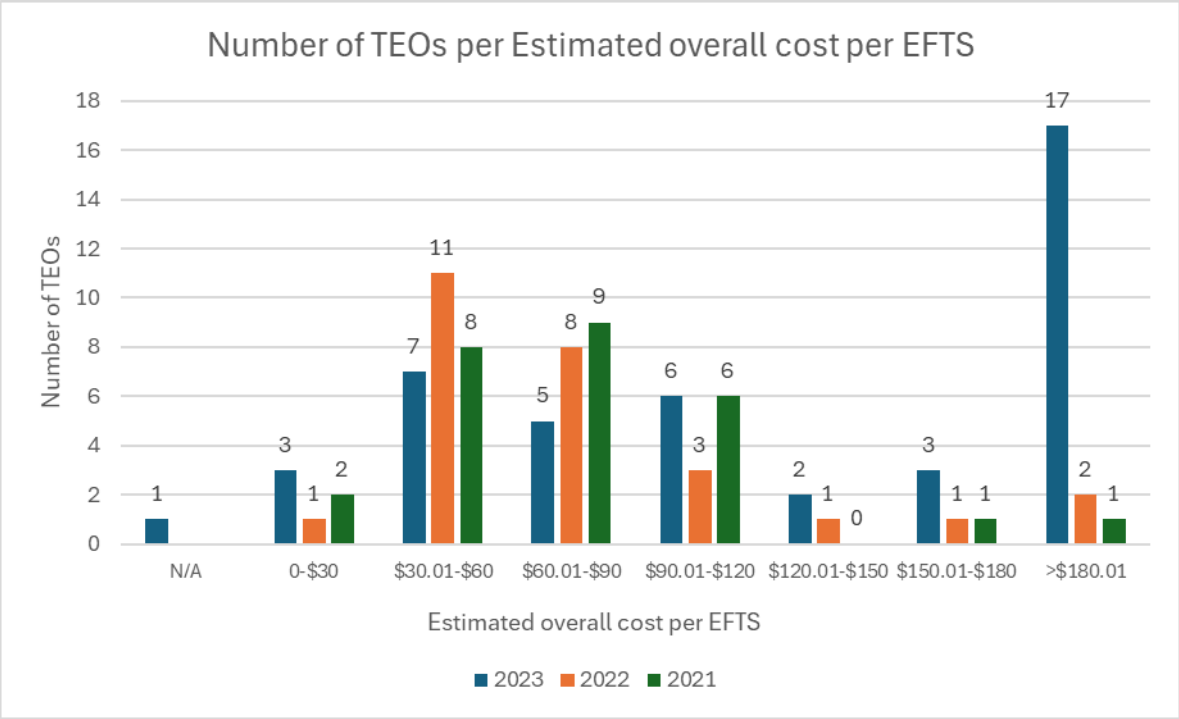
Table of contents

Introduction 1
2023 reported spending on supports for disabled learners 4
Use of TEC *equity funding for students with disabilities* 5
Staff support for disabled learners 5
Total number of learners accessing disability services[5] 5
Waitlists and wait times for support from disability services 5
Distribution of learner counts across various impairment categories[5] 6
Personnel services provided for disabled learners 7
Support services provided for disabled learners 8
Need for additional support 9
Challenges faced 10
Initiatives recently developed to support disabled learners 11
Highlights/successes in supporting disabled learners 12
Next steps for equity funding for disabled learners reporting work 14

2023 reported spending on supports for disabled learners

TEOs were asked to report the estimated overall costs of providing support services for disabled learners, including but not limited to TEC equity funding (if received) for 2023.[4] The total cost across these providers was $19,288,974, ranging from $10,000 to over $1,700,000.

The overall cost per equivalent full-time learner (EFTS) ranged from $25/EFTS[5] to $10,900/EFTS in 2023, with most TEOs ranging between $30 and $120/EFTS. 17 TEOs estimated the cost at $180 and above; most of these TEOs are the newly added PTEs. The graph below shows the number of TEOs within different ranges of estimated overall cost per EFTS in the past three years. Note PTEs were only included in this year's (2023) data set.



Note: The N/A included in this graph is a TEO that did not have an estimated overall cost/EFTS as they did not provide an equity funding template for 2023 returns.

Note: Caution is advised when comparing figures as each organisation's financial systems collate information in different ways. For example, some TEOs 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. We are also aware some TEOs reported figures that were too low to cover the services that are known to be provided at these organisations (potentially an outcome of internal financial coding systems).

[4] All but one TEO provided this information. We have however included the TEO where possible in the graphs and tables that fill out this report as they usually provide data for this report, and we expect them to report in the future.

[5] This estimated overall cost per EFTS excluded the staffing cost while most other TEOs have included this cost.

Use of TEC *Equity funding for students with disabilities*

In previous years' reports we included a high-level TEC *Equity funding for students with disabilities* funding breakdown by size, from smallest to the largest TEI. This provided a high-level range of what TEIs were receiving and how much they were under/overspending. However, we have not included this breakdown as due to changes to equity funding it is not comparable to the previous year's data.

Staff support for disabled learners[6]

TEOs were asked to report the number of staff FTEs who directly supported disabled learners. Alternatively, if there were no specifically assigned staff, TEOs 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 TEOs, as organisations structure their support services in very different ways.

The reported number of staff who directly support disabled learners ranged from 0 to 50 FTEs. A higher number of FTE reports 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 TEOs included paid note-takers and mentors in their data, however others did not.

Total number of learners accessing disability services[5]

TEOs were asked to provide the number of learners who accessed disability services in 2023, reporting each learner only once even if they accessed multiple services/times.

The number of learners accessing services ranged from 0 to 2,562 learners. Larger TEOs tended to report larger numbers of learners accessing disability services. However, as with other data categories, caution should be taken when comparing data between TEOs 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 TEOs counted only learners *registered* with disability support services at the TEO, or only learners whose interaction with disability support led to a *dollar cost*, while others included all learners who had any interaction with disability support services. Additionally, some TEOs that only reported this year stated that they do not have the system in place to measure how many learners are accessing disability services. However, these TEOs have mentioned that they are currently working on putting a system in place to do so in the future.

Waitlists and wait times for support from disability services

TEOs were asked to report information on waitlists for learners when getting disability support, including the amount of time learners have to wait and the number of learners on a waitlist.

A handful of TEOs reported an estimate of 1–2 weeks of wait time for an appointment with a staff member at the busiest time, which is usually at the beginning of the semester. Others

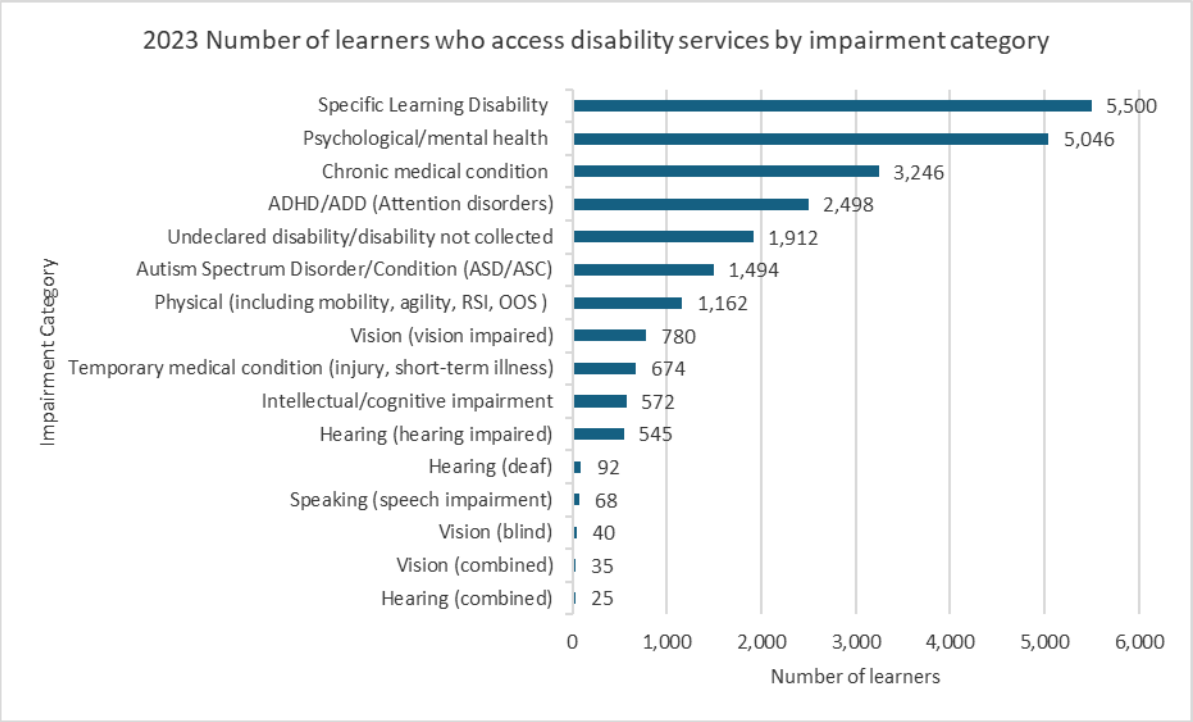
[6] One TEO did not provide any data and has been excluded from these figures.

reported that there is no waitlist, or they don't hold students on waitlists or had no data available.

Distribution of learner counts across various impairment categories[5]

TEOs 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.

Among the TEOs that provided learner numbers, the percentage of learners accessing disability services ranged from 0.0% to 18.6% of the total number of learners within each TEO. 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 *specific learning disability* (5,500 learners), followed by *psychological/mental health* (5,046 learners). For some TEOs a learner can be in more than one category and can therefore be counted in more than one category. Due to the inclusion of PTEs this year, all impairment categories saw a general increase from the previous year.

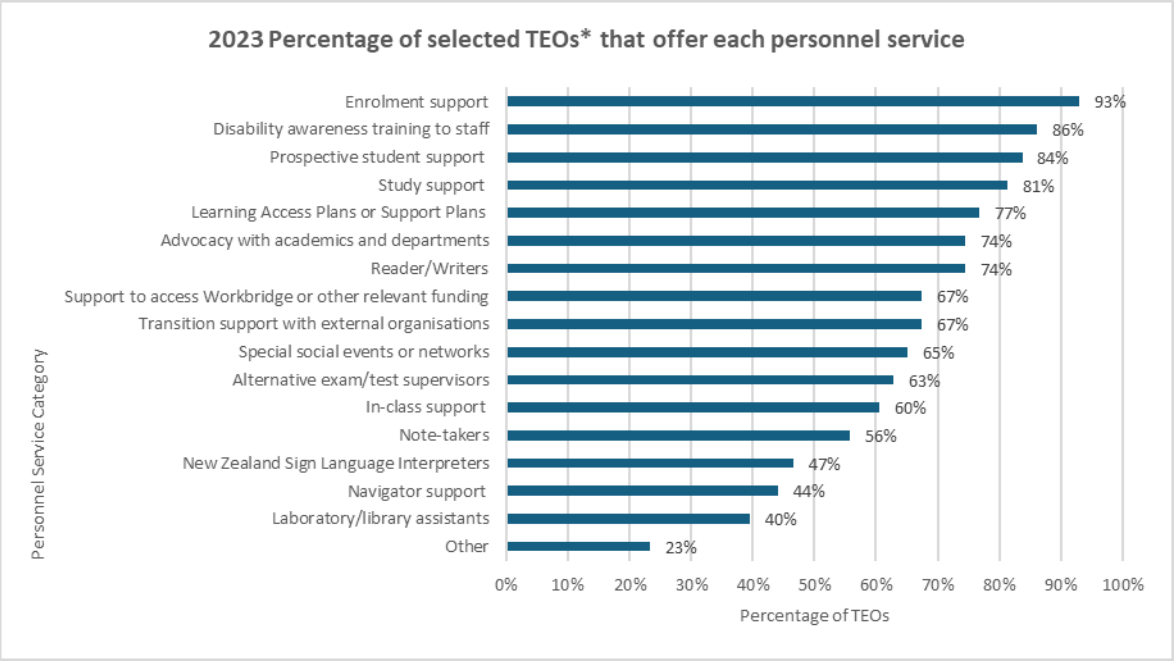
The proportion of learners within each impairment category remains similar to 2022, relative to the total number of learners accessing disability services. The biggest increases in impairment categories were *undeclared disability/disability not collected* (which saw an increase from 1,032 learners in 2022, to 1,912 in 2023), an 85% increase from the previous year. A new impairment category that was added in 2022, *ADHD/ADD (Attention disorders*), saw an increase from 1,669 learners in 2022, to 2,498 in 2023, a 50% increase from the previous year.

Some TEOs provided additional comments, mainly regarding how their numbers had changed in 2023 in comparison to 2022. Several reported significant increases in mental health and chronic health conditions. Challenges remain with the coding of impairments; some learners prefer not to disclose certain impairments.

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

Personnel services[7] provided for disabled learners

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



* In 2024 TEC extended the collection of data to cover all TEOs that are required to produce a Disability Action Plan (ie, all TEOs that receive over $5 million in TEC funding). The data now includes information from the larger private training establishments (PTEs).

The most accessed disability services provided by personnel, and offered by over 80% of TEOs, were *enrolment support* (offered by 93% of TEOs), *disability awareness training to staff* (86%), *prospective student support* (84%) and *study support* (81%).

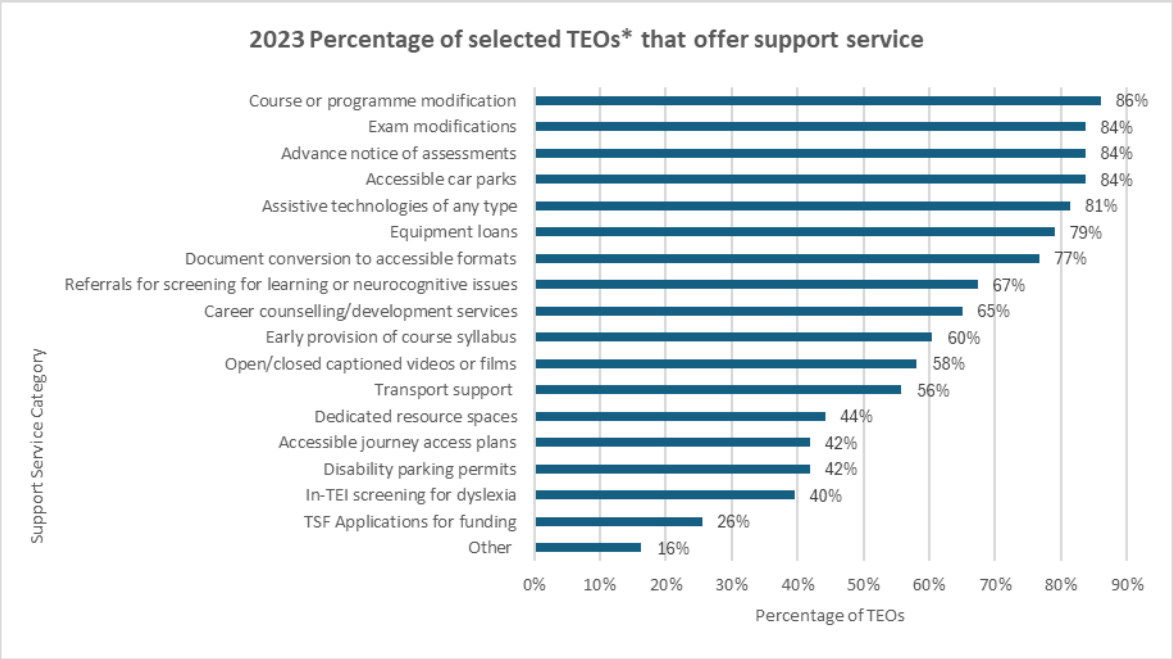
The personnel disability services offered by the fewest TEOs (less than half) were *New Zealand sign language interpreters* (47%), *navigator support* (44%), *laboratory/library assistants* (40%) and *other* (23%). Several TEOs noted some services listed were available to all learners, not

[7] Personnel services are services provided by TEO staff, volunteers and external organisations through the TEO.

only those who identified as disabled. These values are significantly lower than last year, due to PTEs being included in the dataset for the first time in this report.

Support services provided for disabled learners

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



* In 2024 TEC extended the collection of data to cover all TEOs that are required to produce a Disability Action Plan (ie, all TEOs that receive over $5 million in TEC funding). The data now includes information from the larger private training establishments (PTEs).

The most accessed support disability services, offered by over 80% of TEOs, were *course or programme modification* (86%), *exam modification*, *advance notice of assessments* and *accessible car parks* (all 84%) and *assistive technologies of any type* (81%).

The least accessed support disability services offered by less than 50% of TEOs were *dedicated resource spaces* (44%), *accessible journey access plans* and *disability parking permits* (both 42%), *in-TEO screening for dyslexia* (40%), *TSF applications for funding* (26%) and *other* (16%).

Note: TEOs were asked to state whether they provided each service specifically for disabled learners. Some TEOs 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, TEOs were asked if they provided any other services. Fourteen TEOs provided details of other support/personal services. These were:

- A full-time Assistive Technology Advisor who assesses all DSS learners for their AT needs.

- The Disability Service provides Mentor Support for learners with mental health issues, brain injury, ADHD and or Autism.
- Every ākonga that ticks disability on enrolment is sent an email outlining and offering support, this captures those ākonga that have declared a disability but not requiring support.
- Term 1. Navigator Mentoring programme – out of class; Term 2 Atawhai Programme – these programmes support students who experience a MH condition or related condition to transition into our tertiary environment within the first 8–10 weeks of study.
- Work with external organisations; e.g. Real World Living; to facilitate a better transition from school to university. Also, work with external psychologists, psychiatrists and therapists for our students with Mental Health issues, particularly those transitioning from child to adult services.
- Support with online learning, contact and block courses.
- Adaptive technology adviser who identifies adaptive technology to meet a student's needs and trains them in usage, facilitates funding applications. Electronic transcription, mobility van to transport students between halls and campus.
- Counselling support referrals.
- Financial assistance available for students who need to access a GP and/or onsite services available from a Nurse Practitioner or counsellor on the campus. In 2023, there were 178 declared learners who accessed UCOL Wellbeing Service, with a total of 637 individual appointments.
- Support for limited full-time applications to StudyLink; Auckland Transport support letter for student concession rates; support for environmental adjustments to student accommodation & learning spaces.
- Referrals and coordination between university and external services, particularly around wellbeing concerns. Support with StudyLink and WINZ including limited full-time, jobseeker student hardship and training incentive allowance applications.
- A dedicated team to support Specific Learning Difficulties has been added to the team to provide expert guidance and direction for Neurodiverse learners and to assist with L&N difficulties present as a result of disability.
- Wellness course pages in PMA for RELs, they upload local services (health and disability).

Need for additional support

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

- mentors, advisors, pastoral care facilities (8 TEOs)
- assistive/adaptive technology specialist and equipment (11 TEOs)
- assessments and screenings – these include ADHD, SLD diagnostic assessment, educational psychologist assessments, dyslexia screening and neurodiverse diagnosis (16 TEOs)

- student areas – these include dedicated workspaces, communal areas for socialising, rest areas, sensory rooms, and community spaces (7 TEOs)
- pastoral care (7 TEOs)
- NZSL interpreters, assignment submissions and captioning (3 TEOs)
- support and equipment for neurodiverse learners (3 TEOs)
- accessibility (1 TEO)
- impairment Ttchnology (auditory/visual/written) (4 TEOs).

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

Challenges faced

Forty-one TEOs described the main challenges facing them regarding supporting disabled learners in 2023.

Most of the challenges recorded related to the impacts of lack of resources/staffing. These included:[8]

- Each year there is an increase in the number of students with high support needs in class. These students also require ongoing pastoral care, at times very labour intensive. The time and resources required can take away from other students with less support needs but nonetheless would benefit from support.
- Onboarding department staff to enable learners to utilise assistive support technology to take audio recordings/transcripts of classes.
- One of the challenges is having students who suspect they have a diversity like ADHD and are not able to get tested as the wait list is too long or too expensive.
- Building accessibility for wheelchairs and mobility scooters.
- The number of students who access Accessibility Services is continuing to grow, with more frequent appointments. We identified a few years ago that we need to provide more pastoral ongoing support to transition students into our tertiary environment.
- The structure of notetaking service (peer-notetaking) continues to be a struggle. Staffing casual positions to service some aspect of support, such as test supervisors, in-class mentors, etc. Increased workload has placed pressure on existing staff.
- The sheer growth in numbers has been challenging along with the increasing complexity of support required. Space is an issue: office space, space for private discussions, low sensory spaces for students.
- Learners not reporting disabilities or difficulties until they begin to struggle thereby prompting a reactive not a planned response. Difficult to project numbers and types of disabilities resulting in difficulty projecting costs of equipment that might be needed going forward.
- Prior to the service transition the identification and communication of some disabled students' needs was not as systematic as we would have liked.
- Students who have not been diagnosed with a neurodiverse condition, yet support is provided despite non diagnosis, however funding does not cover the resource required.

[8] Wording as reported by TEOs.

- Learners who can't access funding grants or support without a formal diagnosis and simply can't afford the cost of the assessment.
- One of our challenges is that the majority of our learners study off-site remotely, or attend noho (block courses). So, supporting and providing access to all of our learners is difficult and they also are less likely to advise if they are not physically onsite regularly.

Initiatives recently developed to support disabled learners

Forty-one TEOs described recent initiatives developed to support disabled learners in 2023. Examples of the initiatives included:[9]

- Development of online "Disability confidence Toolbox" for staff.
- Improved accessible exam support request process for students and staff.
- Development of programme information documents that outline the realities of classroom environments and day-to-day learning and teaching, outside of assessments.
- Disability support lunches and touch base hui.
- Sign off of the Disability Action Plan (DAP) which was highlighted nationally as being an exemplar for other ITPs to follow. An objective of DAP is building a successful relationship with the student body to promote student voice. This is being met by Professional Development of staff.
- The introduction of Body Doubling has been successful in supporting ākonga to work in small, facilitated groups to complete assessments in a social and comfortable environment.
- 'Quick Wins' funding has allowed staff to offer additional supportive tools that ākonga may not be able to afford.
- We have recently started a series of motivational speakers that will take place throughout the year, specifically aimed at our disabled ākonga. The idea of this initiative is to promote a sense of community and belonging through a disabled ākonga's study journey.
- Launch of the University's first disability case management system (Symplicity Access), including Student Portal for disabled learners.
- Collaborated with the Waikato Disabled Student Association (WDSA), held 3 catchup meetings with the students during Trimester B. This was a space for both staff and students to meet each other.
- 2023 was a year of team building for Disability Services, as our new advisors completed training, settled into the university environment and connected with our students. Later in the year, our wider portfolio underwent a restructure, and we now have our own dedicated manager instead of sitting alongside and under learning support.
- A site licence for TextHelp was renewed and now sits on the Student Desktop for all students to use. We see this as a literacy tool rather than a disability tool. Adaptive Technology Lab in Library refreshed with new purpose-built accessible equipment and software.
- Creative Arts Therapy sessions available to support disabled learners. Individual and group sessions offered depending on the learners preference or needs.

[9] Wording as reported by TEOs.

- We surveyed ākonga, whānau and trainers to identify the needs of ākonga in the training room and trainers in delivery. Regular communication (email and phone) to ākonga who have identified learning support needs to see how they are tracking well-being (pastoral care).
- The new Student Management System has now stabilised enabling data to be more accessible. The data reporting outputs has enabled all tauira who have self-identified to be contacted by dedicated kaimahi for the purposes of clarifying needs and gaining some agreement on each other's expectations of the level of service that is reasonable and practicable.
- A number of initiatives have been implemented as a result of renewed focus from developing the Disability Action Plan. All staff have completed training, accessibility audits have been conducted in our sites and the information published and there is more focus on accurately recording interventions.

A good number of new initiatives were reported by TEOs for the 2023/2024 teaching year. Many of those introduced as a response to the move to online learning have been adopted as BAU by the institutions. The ongoing commitment and care shown by TEO staff was highlighted in many of the initiatives, particularly those involving outreach or increased pastoral care systems. We recognise this has placed a very high burden on many support staff, and we acknowledge the dedication of these staff to supporting disabled learners.

If TEOs wish to know more about any of these initiatives, please contact the TEC Customer Contact Group – we can link you with the relevant TEO for information/support.[10]

Highlights/successes in supporting disabled learners

Forty-one TEOs described highlights or successes in supporting disabled learners in 2023. These included:[11]

- Gaining approval to embed Disability Confidence 101 online training into performance requirements.
- Manaaki fund supporting 26 learners to have assessments for ADHD.
- Large number of students graduate including degrees. Managed to support students across 42 locations after the cyclone.
- In 2023 our service supported 224 students with disabilities. We believe this is due to the increase of awareness and visibility of Disability services meant more students were disclosing a disability and asking for support earlier in their study.
- We have been able to support some of our learners financially through the Manaaki Fund. We are working towards finding a dedicated space for our neurodivergent and disabled learners to utilise on campus.
- The total number of support for ākonga in 2023 was 101 with a completion rate of 76% with support and 68% without supports. 70 exam accommodations were supported in 2023 across 24 Students.
- Start of second bathroom renovation on campus closer to classroom and services, to support a mobility scooter and hoist, completion of an Accessible Spaces report, delivery of Blindness Awareness training to staff.

[10] Customer Contact Group on 0800 601 301, or customerservice@tec.govt.nz, put "Services and Supports for Disabled Learners report" in your email subject line.
[11] Wording as reported by TEOs.

- Filming and promoting a series of short videos highlighting the experiences of some of our disabled ākonga's journey's whilst studying.
- From student associations through to formal university committees, representation by disabled learners.
- Implementation of Disability Action Plan (DAP) – University wide Steering group was created (includes two student representatives) to implement the DAP.
- Collaboration between teams continues to improve in providing wrap around supports and lending expertise from across service areas, driven by our work on the Code and the implementation of our Student Wellbeing and Safety Framework.
- Successful addition of overrides for exams by Inclusive Ed. = calmer students. Initiation of regular catchups with students requiring time management with assignments.
- Students with disabilities have excelled in their studies when provided with quality support tailored to their needs. 2023 saw a larger number of students graduate and it shows that with the removal or barriers, students can thrive academically and reach their full potential.
- Improvements to Student Advisor practice to assess and support students with no diagnosis – developing an integrated response to work alongside clinical support teams, including Student Counselling and Mental Health services and GPs for screening and referrals.
- We were able to source Educational Psychologist services for assessment and developing support plans for learning difficulties. We implemented to gather and analyse data on support services accessed.
- Academic and Wellbeing learner support contracts are used to connect learners with disabilities with an academic team member to provide one on one support.
- Academic outcomes for disabled learners were within 2% in comparison to those without a disability.
- We created a Disability Reference Group to make decisions on behalf of our ākonga.
- Review of policies to ensure that withdrawal, complaint and appeal policies and procedures do not disadvantage tauira with disabilities.

We were heartened to hear that TEOs 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 have noted in earlier data reports, better data on disabled people's current position and outcomes is a 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 ongoing actions to support staff understanding and practice for supporting disabled learners.

The detailed information collected in this report continues to inform work being undertaken by the TEC and MoE. It is helping inform ongoing work on the Unified Funding 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 TEOs wish to know more about any of these initiatives, please contact the Customer Contact Group at the TEC – we can link you with the relevant TEO for information/support.[12]

Next steps for Equity funding for disabled learners reporting work

Cross-sector work

We 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 TEOs to help them best support their learners.

2023 reporting

This report (for the 2023 year) will help the TEC and MoE better understand the experiences of TEOs providing supports for disabled learners. We will continue to report back to the sector to help share initiatives and successes. The inclusion of PTE data this year, and going forward, will enable us over time to build a more holistic understanding of how TEOs are supporting disabled learners.

Planning for 2024 and beyond

Data collection and sector level reporting on the services and supports provided to disabled learners will continue in coming years.

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 our 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 whānau. The Kia Ōrite development team will continue to add to the toolkit with additional training and resource material.

[12] Customer Contact Group on 0800 601 301, or customerservice@tec.govt.nz, put "Services and Supports for Disabled Learners report" in your email subject line.