

# 2020 Equity funding for tertiary students with disabilities – Tertiary Education Institutions data reporting

## Introduction

The Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) has collected information from Tertiary Education Institutions<sup>1</sup> (TEIs) about their use of the TEC fund, *equity funding for students with disabilities*<sup>2</sup>, since 2018. This information is used to support work being undertaken by TEC and the Ministry of Education (MoE), and 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 2021, TEC requested data from all 27 TEIs on their use of *equity funding for tertiary students with disabilities* for the 2020 funding year. The 2020 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 2020 reporting round improved again on the 2019 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.

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<sup>1</sup> TEIs include Universities, Te Pūkenga subsidiaries and Wānanga.

<sup>2</sup> 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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## 2020 equity funding for disabled learners

This year, all TEIs returned<sup>3</sup> completed reports. Overall, they received a total of \$5,427,010 in *equity funding for students with disabilities* from TEC<sup>4</sup>. The equity funding received by each TEI ranged from \$8,909 to \$805,893. 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.

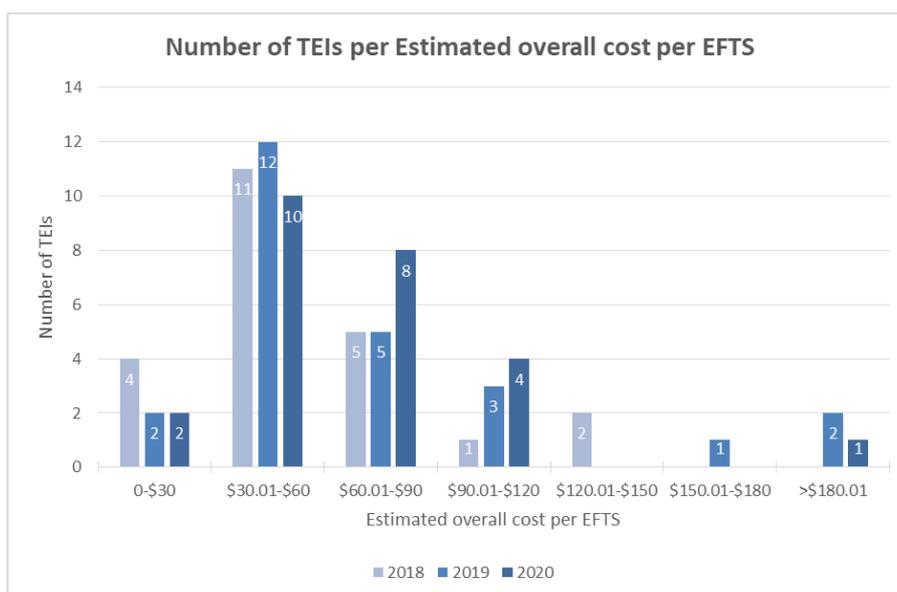
TEIs were asked to report the estimated overall costs of providing support services for disabled learners, including but not limited to TEC equity funding for 2020. All but one TEI provided this information. The total cost across these providers was \$11,735,340, ranging from \$1,055 to over \$2.08 million.

Twenty-four TEIs reported spending more than the TEC equity funding allocation while supporting their disabled learners, with 13 TEIs spending more than double the amount they had received from the TEC. One TEI did not hold data on their spending. We appreciate the extra efforts made by some TEOs in providing services to their learners with disabilities.

The overall cost per EFTS ranged from \$19.3/EFTS to \$217/EFTS in 2020, 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.

<sup>3</sup> In 2019, 25 TEIs returned the report and in 2018, 26 TEIs returned the report.

<sup>4</sup> In 2019, 27 TEIs received a total of \$5,262,386 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 TEI’s reported figures which could not cover the services that are known to be provided at these organisations (potentially an outcome of internal financial coding systems unable to extract the required information).

### 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 zero to 30.43 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 FTE’s 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 FTE’s) 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 2020, reporting each learner only once even if they accessed multiple services / times.

The number of learners accessing services ranged from zero to 2,234 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

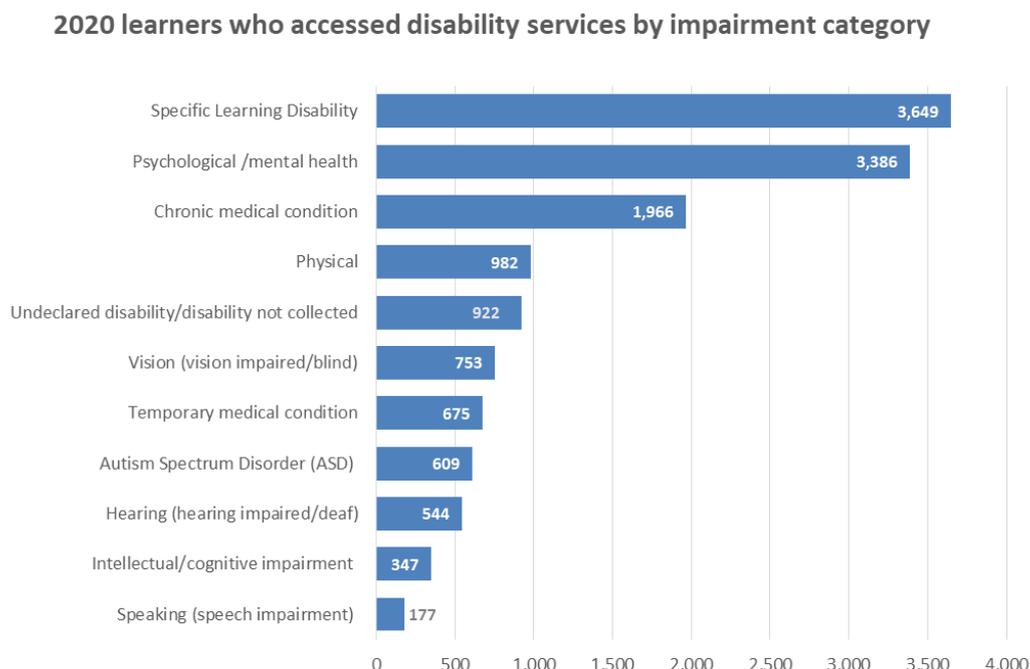
One TEI reported having a waitlist of 3.5 weeks for students with specific learning disabilities for screening and/or assessment for learning support. They reported having 25 learners on the waitlist in 2020. None of the other TEIs reported having a waitlist. However, three TEIs reported their students had experienced a wait time of 1-2 weeks for an appointment with a disability advisor at the beginning of the semester/trimester.

### 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.

Two TEIs reported that no learners accessed their disability services. Among the TEIs that provided learner numbers, the percentage of learners accessing disability services ranged from 0.3% to 13% 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 *specific learning disability* (3,649 learners), followed by *psychological/mental health* (3,386 learners). For some TEI's 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 2020 were similar to 2019. The one exception was *undeclared disability*, which nearly doubled from 477 learners in 2019 to 922 learners in 2020.

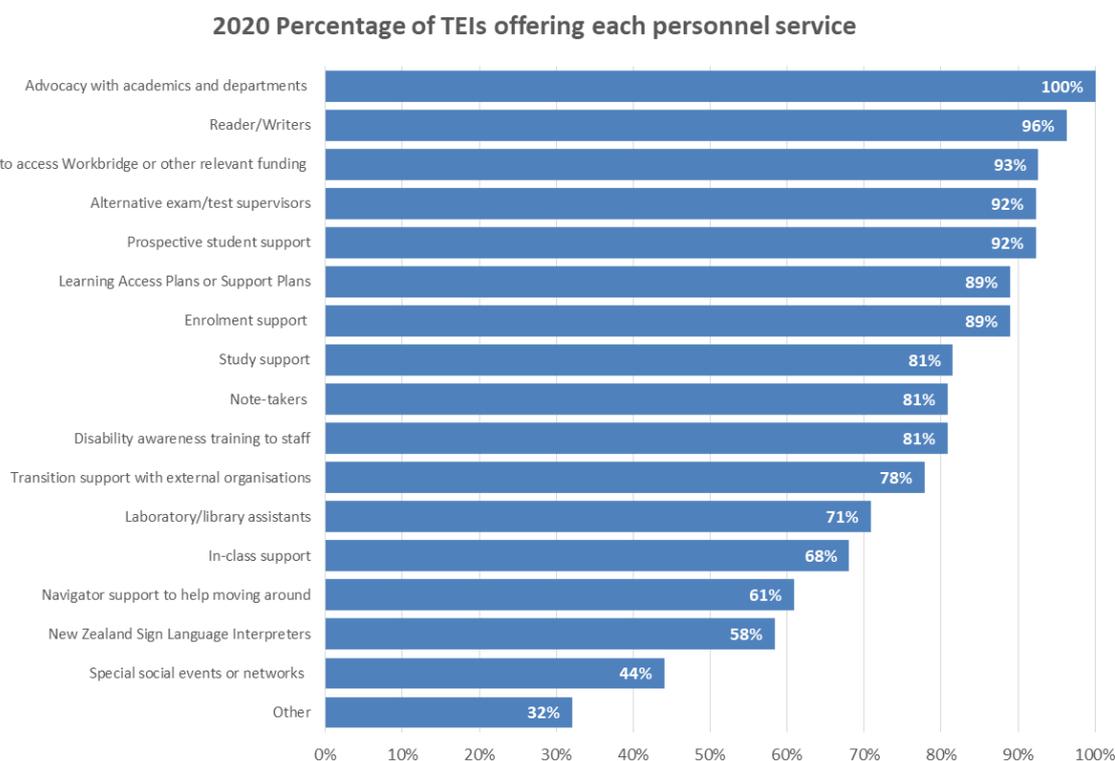
Some TEIs provided additional comments, mainly regarding how their numbers had changed in 2020 in comparison to 2019. Several reported significant increases in mental health and chronic health conditions, with one reporting a significant rise in learners with identified autism. Challenges remain with the coding of impairments, and with some learner’s reluctance to disclose certain impairments.

One TEI commented that the 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’s (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.



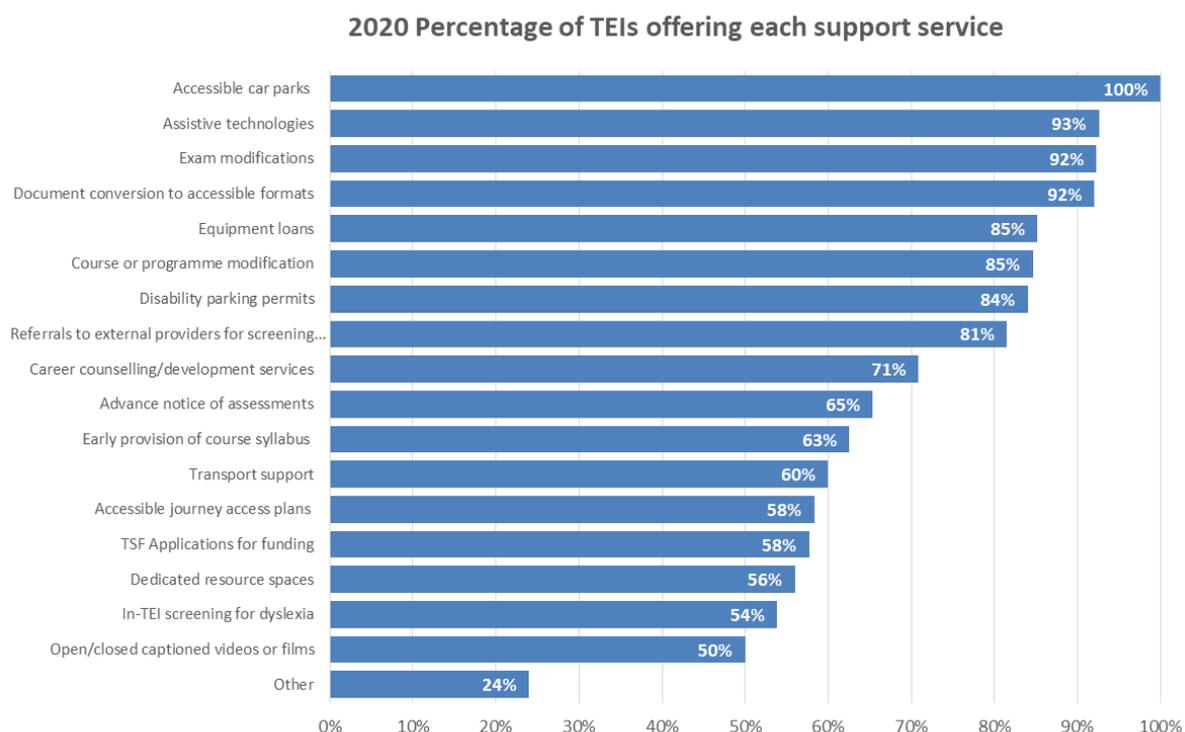
The top personnel disability services, offered by over 90% of TEIs, were *advocacy with academics and departments* (offered by all TEIs, 100%), *reader/writers* (96%), *support to access Workbridge* (93%), *alternative exam/test supervisors* (92%) and *prospective student support* (92%).

The personnel disability services offered by the fewest TEIs were *special social events or networks* (44%) and *NZ sign language interpreters* (58%).

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 *accessible car parks* (offered by all TEIs, 100%), *assistive technologies* (93%), *exam modifications* (92%) and *document conversion to accessible formats* (92%).

The bottom three support disability services offered were *open/closed captioned videos or films* (50%), *in-TEI screening for dyslexia* (54%) and *dedicated resource spaces* (56%).

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:

- Referral to internal student support services
- Student Foodbank services
- Counselling, nurse and doctor services
- Access to Engagement Facilitators who provide pastoral care
- Mātauranga Māori Facilitator
- Careers & Employability Team support
- Support for limited full-time applications to StudyLink
- Initiatives for developing transport facilities for students at concession rates

- Support for environmental adjustments to student accommodation & learning spaces

### 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 (12 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 (5 TEIs)
- NZSL interpreters (2 TEIs)
- Open/Closed captions on media (2 TEIs)
- On-campus nurse (1 TEI)
- Further support to expand scope of making University more accessible from enrolment to graduation and post-study employment (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-five TEIs described the main challenges facing them in regards to supporting disabled learners in 2020.

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 tech access at home
- Mental distress and anxiety in learners, especially those with pre-existing mental health challenges, autism and ADHD
- Withdrawal of learners in semester 1
- 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. Need 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-three TEIs described recent initiatives developed to support disabled learners. Examples of the initiatives included:

- Started providing disability services remotely
- Appointed a full-time Assistive Technology advisor
- Started mentoring service to support learners who are on the Autism Spectrum, those with brain injuries, mental health conditions and ADHD
- Engaged a disability consultant who, in conjunction with the Manager of Disability Services, ran four well attended disability equality sessions for managers
- Extended extra support to students during lockdown, resulting in lower withdrawal of learners with disabilities during lockdown
- Ran two pilots on outreach to disabled learners – focus on assessment and wellbeing
- 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
- A staff member was trained and certified as a SPELD assessor (for identification of dyslexia)
- Provided targeted workshops for new students focusing on study techniques around dyslexia
- SMS was improved to share information and processes and systems have been refined and improved
- An early alert system in CRM is now in place that flags direct referrals from external community partners and activates appropriate transition support for these learners
- Conducted several dyslexia screenings and assisted exams with zero waiting list
- Expanded support to include more mental health diagnoses
- Successful collaboration with Workbridge to deliver workshops to students about their services
- Working closely with Māori pastoral support workers to get Māori disabled learners linked to support earlier in the enrolment process
- Staff were able to participate in the online pathways: Advancing Inclusion in 2020 and Beyond Conference due to it being hosted online
- 2020 New Zealand Sign Language (NZSL) classes were offered by disability support service to both staff and students
- Using Technology Access Fund for Learners (TAFL) funding to pilot a University wide site licence of the inclusive learning tools Read & Write and EquatIO to support students with the significant increase in online material and piloting an in-house captioning service to identify the most effective ways to delivery captioning services pan University
- Recognised and strengthened blended learning delivery methods which achieve benefits for inclusive educational delivery
- Increased rate of disabled learners passing papers
- Digital Equity initiative - allocation of hardware, software and data to students
- Disability Support Service students recruited and actively participating in student leadership and peer support via the Student Ambassador programme
- NZSL support staff learnt new skills with filming and recording

- Online dyslexia and dyscalculia screening made accessible for students during lockdown - has proved to have been a successful initiative
- Increased support using Sonocent licences (adaptive technology)
- Digitised Academic Accommodation Plans and efficiencies on access
- Deployed Studiosity (online academic learning support) - unlimited access to the cohort
- Created and utilised Student Sentiment database to capture student voice
- Prioritised disabled learner cohort to receive financial assistance during COVID
- PEEP - Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans developed for students with mobility constraints.

A large number of new initiatives were reported by TEIs for the 2020 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 / support<sup>5</sup>.

### Highlights/successes in supporting disabled learners

Twenty-four TEIs described highlights or successes in supporting disabled learners in 2020. These included:

- Development of the mentoring service
- Development of a Learner Engagement tab in the organisation's database, which helped to track the activities and performance 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
- Automatic eTXT on application inviting students with a disability to make contact with the disability service
- Number of students registered with Disability Services is now at the point where the University student community is representative of the New Zealand disability population
- Setting up individual plans for students as required and having regular contact with tutors
- Follow up made with students who indicated disability but not requested support
- Have been developing the Education Access Plan (EAP/ILP) to capture the wider student journey
- Have been developing a Disability Action Plan (DAP)
- Development of a new and enhanced resource room to replace an existing resource room for students with disabilities
- Partnerships with other University services under a "case management" model as part of Ōritetanga programme
- Development of triage system to target support and needs based on individual student needs
- Data showing disabled learners who accessed the disability service passed at a higher % than those disabled learners who did not access the service
- Developed an assessment outreach pilot and a wellbeing outreach pilot

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<sup>5</sup> You can reach the team via the Customer Contact Group on 0800 601 301, or [customerservice@tec.govt.nz](mailto:customerservice@tec.govt.nz), put 'Equity Funding for disabled students reporting' in your subject line.



- Embedded disability inclusion and accessibility within the Course Resilience Project Toiere with the Centre for Academic Development
- Developed a resource for staff Disability Inclusion and Accessibility in Digital Course Delivery in conjunction with the Centre for Academic Development
- Used TAFL funding allocated from the TEC in 2020 for piloting a TEI wide site licence of the inclusive learning tools Read & Write and EquatIO and for piloting an in-house captioning service to identify the most effective ways to deliver captioning services
- Investigating the use of Otter for Live transcription in combination with Sennheiser wireless microphones for lecture capture and live Zoom sessions, and TextHelp exam mode for assessments for students requiring a Reader
- Faculty staff now have ability to obtain their student's Academic Accommodation Plans online

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 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 / support<sup>6</sup>.

## 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.

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<sup>6</sup> You can reach the team via the Customer Contact Group on 0800 601 301, or [customerservice@tec.govt.nz](mailto:customerservice@tec.govt.nz), put 'Equity Funding for disabled students reporting' in your subject line.

### **Planning for 2022 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 re-development and launch of Kia Ōrite is a key part of the TEC's commitment to support disabled learners. The Toolkit will support 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.