

## THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO

### Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

#### Staff and student consultation report on the Disability Action Plan 2023-2025

We would like to thank everyone who provided feedback on the Disability Action Plan (DAP). Overall, the feedback was very constructive. We carefully considered each submission. The points raised, and our responses, are detailed below.

1. The Plan focuses on students rather than staff. This is because the University must follow the instructions provided by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) which is seeking to achieve an inclusive and equitable tertiary education environment for disabled learners. We do agree, however, that if we are to build a supportive community for disabled learners then the institution itself needs to tackle the ingrained ableism in the workplace for staff and students. A paragraph to this effect has been added to make this clearer (see p. 3).
2. There is a need to “put the plan into the context of the family of university strategies and plans”. This information is already contained in the Plan (“The DAP aligns with our University Strategy 2022-2024, Academic Plan 2022-2026, Te Rautaki Māori - Māori Advancement Plan 2022-2026, Pacific Strategic Plan 2021-2025, Research Plan 2022-2026 and the Report of the Taskforce on Racism 2021 ...” pp 8-9).
3. It was suggested that the heading 'a snapshot of disabled students' be changed to 'a snapshot of students with or reporting a disability'. We understand the importance of language and that the term 'disabled' is both dynamic and contested. After careful consideration we have decided to retain the term 'disabled students' because it reflects both TEC's language and perhaps more importantly the language advocated for by disabled people who have framed the new Ministry for Disabled People – Whaikaha (<https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/>). An important part of our work going forward will be to consult further with disability and cultural communities to gain perspectives on the language we use.
4. The value of disabled students registering with Accessibility Services especially if enrolled in science-based subjects with labs and field-trips was highlighted in several submissions. This point will be included in the 'Indicators of Success Appendix' (see p. 10) to be produced within six months of the Plan being submitted to TEC. This Appendix is in essence an implementation plan. Balancing issues such as rights to privacy, disclosure, and health and safety (e.g. in labs) need to be carefully worked through. Adapting buildings and facilities is an important task to ensure the University is accessible to all students. The plan has a strong focus on this along with a commitment to using Universal Design approaches for all future work (see Objective 3).
5. Does the University plan cover all digital touchpoints that disabled students may encounter on their journey (e.g. MyWaikato/application process, website, WaikatoUni app, etc) or only teaching and learning platforms? This question has been noted and will be included in the 'Indicators of Success Appendix'.
6. Include information on Chinese and Indian students in Tables 5 and 7 since together they make up approximately 20 percent of the student population. This is a fair point. Information currently

included in the tables focuses on Māori students and Pacific students because these are the ethnic groups TEC require universities to report on. We will therefore leave the data as presented in the Plan but note an opportunity to further investigate other ethnic groups in the 'Indicators of Success Appendix'. For example, it is evident that very few students from China and India indicate they have a disability on their application to enrol (see Table 1 below). This is worthy of further investigation.

**Table 1: Number of students who indicate a disability on application to enrol**

	2017	2018	2019	2019	2020	2021
China	5	4	5	2	0	0
India	1	0	0	0	1	0

7. The term Asperger's has been deleted as it tends to no longer be used as a valid diagnosis in New Zealand. It is now part of a broader category called autism spectrum disorder (ASD).

8. *Specific* physical infrastructure projects (e.g. the addition of ramps, improved signage for and access to lifts, and improvements to learning space) and for virtual projects (e.g. having captions for lectures and videos on Moodle) will be detailed in the 'Indicators of Success Appendix'.

9. The bullet point under Objective 4 has been changed to refer to both the Waikato Disabled Students' Association *and* the National Disabled Students' Association.

10. The comment on being more optimistic in relation to targets for registrations with Accessibility Services will be considered.

11. It is agreed that a stronger commitment than simply 'providing' professional development to 'adequately' support disabled learners would be ideal. We are very open to the idea of developing a module on disability and inclusion that outlines the University's commitment and expectations of staff that staff will be required to complete. This will be considered when developing the 'Indicators of Success Appendix'.

12. It is agreed that the development of a website to support the aims of the DAP is an excellent idea. This has been discussed by the DAP and is connected to Objective 1 action point "*Develop and implement University wide campaigns to raise awareness of diversity and develop a University communication strategy to support this*" (p. 14) and again, will be included in the 'Indicators of Success Appendix'.

13. It is agreed that it is vital to engage in 'customer empathy work' or similar work (recently colleagues at the University of Waikato have been engaging in 'UX – User Experience Research and Design Methods'). Work must begin with the lived experiences of disabled learners. The action point referred to in point 12 above will guide some of this work along with Objective 4 and the first action point to provide professional development that is co-developed and co-facilitated by disabled students.

14. The wording in Section 1.3 has been changed to indicate that there will be opportunities for disabled students and staff to be represented on the new Access and Inclusion Working Group and to lead and co-lead different workstreams.

15. It is agreed that divisional/faculty representation may be useful to represent differences across subject areas. This is already included in the clause: "the importance of having ... disabled students from across Divisions, campuses and experiences of learning and living at Te Whare Wānanga o

Waikato The University of Waikato are represented.” Staff, especially disabled staff, from different Divisions can also be included in the Group.

16. The point was made that the DAP is strongly focused on the physical environment, but there are other barriers. We agree that challenges are often presented through university processes. The DAP addresses many of these, for example in Section 1.2 - “challenges to online access and inclusion due mainly to inaccessible teaching and learning materials, and a significant issue with teaching staff attitudes and approaches to understanding and implementing accommodations for, and adaptations to teaching, learning and assessment.” Also, throughout the DAP the disabled student voice and experience is highlighted – when ‘disabled student’ is referred to it is inclusive of all students who are identifying as disabled which reflects diverse experiences as evidenced by the accessibility data included for example in Table 12 (p. 8). It is also noted in the DAP that given the data we have there “also needs to be a concerted effort to understand the barriers experienced by students with mental health and psychological disabling conditions, and neurological and cognitive conditions” (p. 8) as they represent a large percentage of students using Accessibility services.

17. Other feedback that has not been specifically mentioned in this report has been noted and will be considered as the University begins to undertake further work in this area (e.g. the importance of not focusing solely on physical disabilities, writing as a form of communication not being appropriate for some disabled learners, and some students being fearful of registering their disability with the University). These issues are reflected in a number of the responses to other comments and in the DAP objectives and actions – in particular where the actions are to engage with disabled students to lead the work of the Plan.

Again, our sincere thanks to all those who took the time to engage with the DAP and provide feedback. Your thoughts and comments helped us to create a stronger Plan and begin to develop an ‘Indicators of Success Appendix’ which will be appended to the Plan within six months of it being approved by TEC.

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