# 2019 *equity funding for tertiary students with disabilities – TEI data reporting*

Introduction

In August 2020, data was requested from 27 TEIs (comprising the Universities, Polytechnics and Wānanga) on their utilisation of the TEC *equity funding for tertiary students with disabilities*[1] for the 2019 funding year. Responses were received from 25 TEIs. Data collected included costs, staff numbers, number of learners accessing disability services, impairment categories, services provided and challenges.

Following conversations with TEI's in early 2020, changes were made to the data collection template for the 2019 data year to improve the data quality submitted and to support consistency in the data collected across all TEIs. The majority of changes were to improve the standardised list of disability types, and services provided. As a result, the quality of data received improved. This has laid a foundation for reporting year on year trends.

The collection of this data is very important, as it supports work being undertaken by the TEC and the Ministry of Education (MoE), to improve outcomes for disabled learners in the tertiary sector. For example, data collected in 2020 for the 2019 reporting year is being used to help inform wider government policy decisions about equity funding for disabled learners, including work being done as part of Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE).

The TEC appreciates TEI's efforts in collecting and collating this data, and acknowledges TEI data systems are not necessarily set up to produce the data sets requested in this report.

**2019 Equity funding for disabled learners**

In 2019, 27 TEIs received a total of $5,262,386 in *equity funding for students with disabilities* from TEC[2]. The equity funding received by each TEI ranged from $10,236 to $802,056. The large variation was due to the equity funding calculation which is based on each TEIs Equivalent Full Time Student (EFTS) multiplied by a standard dollar rate.

TEIs were asked to report estimated overall costs of providing support services for disabled learners, including but not limited to TEC equity funding for 2019. All 25 TEIs who returned the report provided this information. The total cost across these providers was $11,796,182, ranging from $10,000 to over $2.28 million.

23 TEIs reported spending more than the TEC equity funding provision while supporting disabled learners (which is expected). The range of additional spending varied from 16% to 477% more, with 13 TEIs spending more than double the amount they received from TEC.

Significant caution should be applied in regard to comparing figures between TEI's, as organisations financial systems collated information in different ways to provide their spending data. For example, some TEI's have been able to report staff costs only (for staff directly supporting disabled learners as their primary role), while others have been able to include staff and resource costs, while others included components, but not all, of both staff and resources.

[1] 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.

[2] In 2018, 27 TEIs received a total of $5,506,681 in *equity funding for students with disabilities* from TEC. The lower number in 2019 was due to lower EFTS.

**Staff support for disabled learners**

TEI's were asked to report the number of staff FTE's who directly supported disabled learners, or, where there were no specifically assigned staff, to record the number of general staff who could assist with disability-related support requests. All 25 TEI's provided this data. Significant caution should be applied in regard to comparing figures between TEI's, as organisations structure their support services in very different ways.

The reported number of staff who directly support disabled learners ranged from 0.8 to 33.3 FTE's. Where higher numbers were reported, this always indicated reporting of staff across the wider TEI who coded to supporting learners with a disability in some aspect of their role. Some TEI's included paid note-takers and mentors in their data, however others did not.

Taking generic pool staff out of the data set, TEI's reported an average of around four FTE's directly supporting disabled learners. Larger TEI's tended to have larger teams solely involved in supporting disabled leaners (5 – 12 FTE's) , while smaller TEI's reported less dedicated staff (1 – 3 FTE's) and relied more on wider staff support roles.

**Total number of learners accessing disability services**

23 of the 25 TEI's who provided reporting were able to quantify the number of learners who accessed disability services. TEI's were asked to report a learner only once, even if they accessed multiple services / times.

The number of learners accessing services ranged from 92 to 2,065. Larger TEIs tended to report larger numbers of learners accessing disability services. However, as with other data categories, caution should be taken in comparing data between TEI's, as organisations data collection practices differ, meaning which learners exactly were included in this count varied widely between organisations. For example, some TEIs counted only learners *registered* with disability support services at the TEI, or only those whose interaction with disability support led to a *dollar cost* (beyond advice), while others included all those who had any interaction with disability support.

**Waitlists for support from disability services**

Most TEI's had no waitlist for support, aside from one who reported learners waiting for screening for learning disabilities. However, some TEIs did not hold a wait list, and two could not provide the data. Most indicated learners could access an appointment with the service within a week of enquiring (if not sooner).

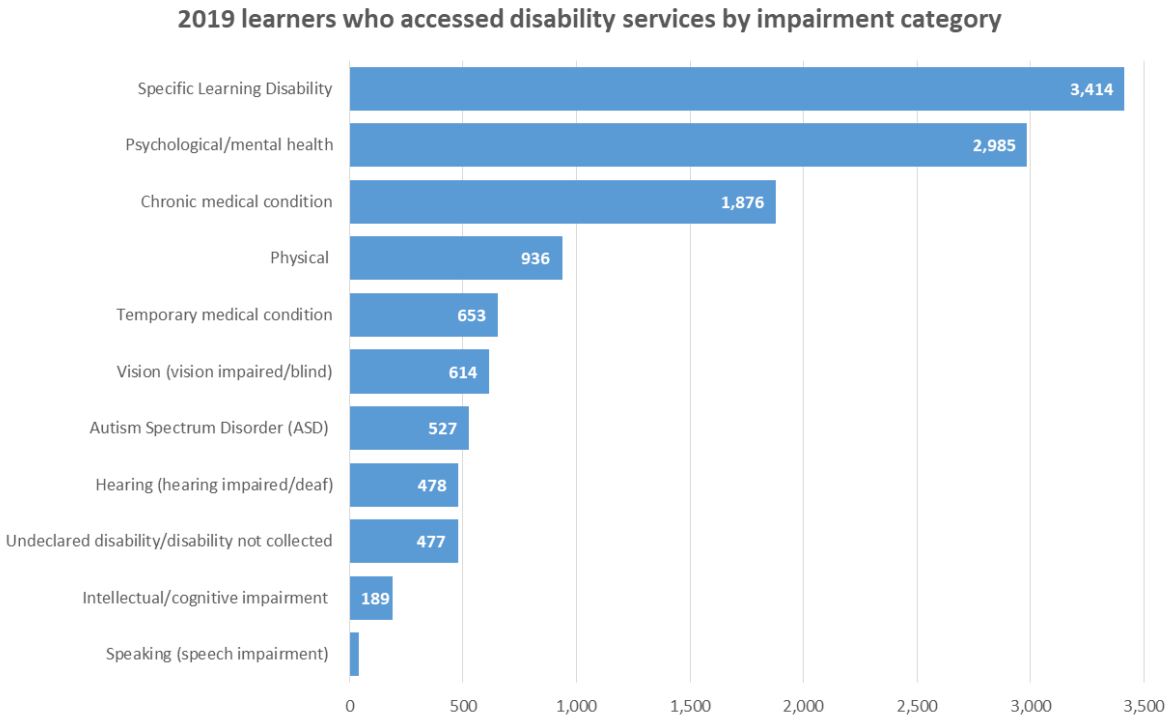
While TEI's did not have waitlists for general support, several noted that if learners did not meet with them prior to enrolment, or in advance of needing support, it could take several weeks to be able to provide the support or accommodation they needed. Wait times at the start of the academic year could be up to 2 weeks at some TEI's. Many TEI's were actively managing this risk by reaching out to all learners who indicated disability on enrolment. One TEI also noted they backdated academic supports or other accommodations to the time a learner requested their appointment.

**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).

In 2019, the percentage of learners accessing disability services ranged from 0.5% to 14.9% of the total number of learners within TEIs who provided this data. Two of the 25 TEIs who provided reporting were unable to provide the number of learners who accessed their disability services.

The top two impairment categories with the highest number of learners were specific learning disability (3,414 learners) and psychological/mental health (2,985 learners). We are unable to compare these numbers to the 2018 report as the categories changed substantially.




Many TEI's provided additional comment regarding impairments. These included:

- Coding for capturing disability is complicated, and some learners have multiple disabilities but will only be recorded in one category. Learners may also choose not to declare the disability
- That they are supporting learners with traumatic brain injuries (which might fall into several categories, depending on the effect of the injury)
- Larger numbers of learners on the ASD spectrum than disclose this on enrolment
- ASD learners are often high users of disability support services
- Many learners have never had a diagnosis of a specific learning disability until they come to seek support at the TEI
- Many learners do not declare a disability on enrolment but need utilise disability support services – this makes it very tricky for TEI's to estimate demand, and often means learners are asking for support at the last minute (such as just before an assignment is due)
- Learners are often very reluctant to declare chronic medical conditions to support services.

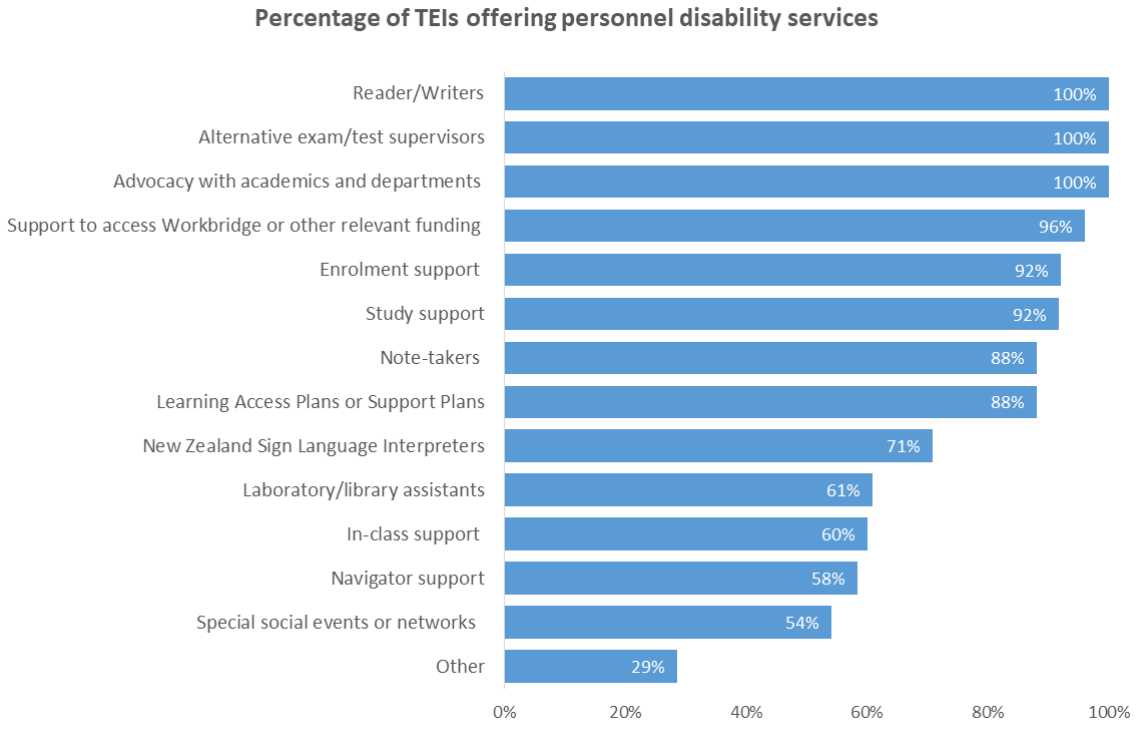
*TEC appreciates the additional information provided by TEI's to help clarify their data, and highlight issues with collection. We note in particular the real challenges around supporting learners to feel safe to disclose disability on enrolment.*

**Personnel services provided for disabled learners**

TEIs were asked to report on personnel services provided for disabled learners (from a standardised list). While 25 TEIs responded some TEIs left some of the personnel service fields blank or indicated these were not applicable. The below percentages offering personnel services excludes any not applicable responses.

The top three personnel disability services were offered by all 25 TEIs which returned the report. These were advocacy with academics and departments, alternative exam/test supervisors, and reader/writers (100%).

The bottom four personnel disability services offered were special social events or networks (54%), navigator support (58%), in-class support (60%) and laboratory/library assistants (61%).




Several TEI's noted that some of the services listed were available to all learners, not only those who identified as disabled

In addition to the standardised list, six TEI's reported offering one or more of the following services:

- Prospective student support - careers advice to ensure student is on the correct study pathway and enrolment support (six TEI's). One TEI noted this support could start up to 6 months before a learner enrolled.
- Adaptive technology adviser who identifies adaptive technology to meet a student's needs and trains them in usage, facilitates funding applications (one TEI).
- Provision of disability awareness training sessions, workshops and courses (three TEI's). E.g., Symposium on 'Inclusiveness', ASD workshops for staff, Blind & Low Vision specialists, delivering NZSL workshops to staff and students.
- Work with external organisations; e.g. Real World Living; to facilitate a better transition from school to university (three TEI's).
- Work with external psychologists, psychiatrists and therapists for our students with Mental Health issues, particularly those transitioning from child to adult services (one TEI).

Additional services identified above will be added to reporting field options for 2020 reporting.

**Support services provided for disabled learners**

TEIs were asked to report on support services provided for disabled learners (from a standardised list). While 25 TEIs responded some TEIs left some of the support service fields blank or indicated these

were not applicable. The below percentages offering support services excludes any not applicable responses.

The top three support disability services offered by the majority of TEIs were document conversion to accessible formats (96%), accessible car parks (96%), and exam modifications (96%).

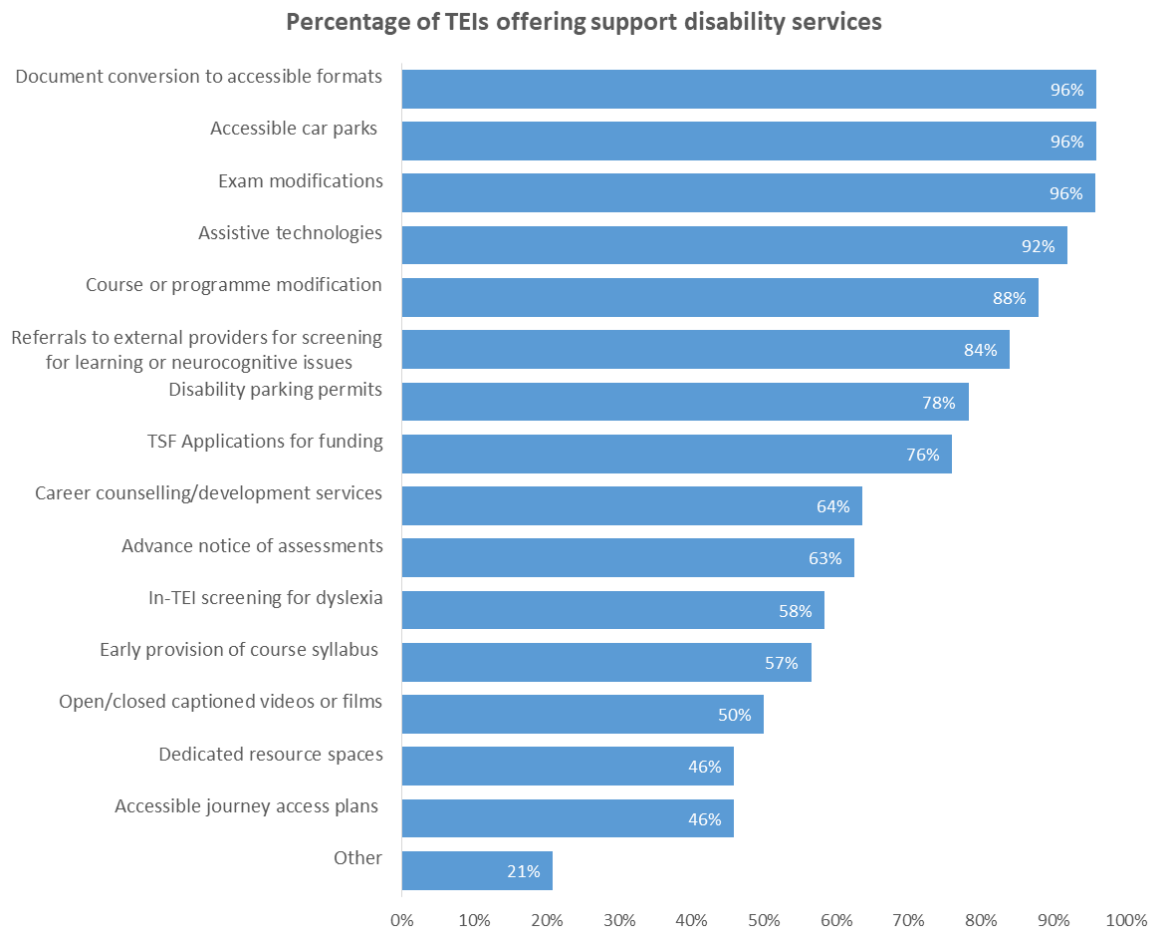
The bottom four support disability services offered were accessible journey access plans (46%), dedicated resource spaces (46%), open/closed captioned videos or films (50%) and early provision of course syllabus (57%).

Note: TEI's were asked to state if they provided the service specifically for disabled learners. Where services provided were available to all learners, some TEI's have not recorded them, however they will be available to disabled learners.

In addition to the standardised list, four TEI's reported offering one or more of the following services:

- Equipment loans (two TEI's)
- Mobility van to transport students between halls and campus (one TEI)
- Taxi chits for those with mobility issues (one TEI)

Additional services identified above will be added to reporting field options for 2020 reporting.



**Need for additional support**

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

- Assistive technology related improvements
- Assistive technology equipment and licences (such as Dragon Dictation licences)
- Social/Academic Disability Peer Mentors/Tutors
- Educational Psychology Assessments & Learning Assessments for students with SLD etc.
- New Zealand Sign Language Interpreter Support
- Captioning of digital content
- On campus counselling services (vs having to refer to external services)
- Dedicated resource spaces and study spaces
- Screening/testing for dyslexia
- Setting up a network or online community site for students with disabilities

The main reasons for currently not providing these services were due to cost constraints and the lack of human resources.

One TEI noted that in 2019 they had not been able to provide a lending service for some Assistive technology equipment, however the introduction of the TAFL fund had enabled them to do this in 2020.

**Challenges faced**

Twenty four TEIs described the main challenges facing them in regards to supporting disabled learners in 2019. Some TEI's included challenges arising in 2020 as a result of Covid-19.

The major challenges identified were:

- Increasing number of students requiring disability support – as more students are better supported through the compulsory education system, more learners with higher, more complex needs and challenging personal circumstances are 'making it through' to tertiary.
- Students with undiagnosed learning disabilities arriving at the TEI and requiring diagnosis and extensive support to come to terms with their learning needs and how they can use accessible technology and support services (many have never had any support in school, especially older learners). Harder and more expensive to access diagnosis as an adult.
- Students not disclosing disabilities during enrolment, due to fear of discrimination, or not being aware of learning or mental health needs.
- Increase in number of students with mental health issues.
- Difficulty with providing NZSL interpreters: reported in remote / rural campuses (simply not available); reported in regards to long blocks of learning such as practicums (10 weeks), noho marae overnight stays, workshops, vocational training.
- Limited staff disability awareness knowledge, leading to a lack of empathy or / and confidence in staff, especially in responding to learners with mental health challenges.
- Limited access to external disability support services for learners at regional TEI's.
- Physical campus limitations, including lack of access to buildings; labs and other teaching spaces with desks or benches that were not accessible; lack of accessible toilets (some smaller campuses may have only one highly accessible toilet); inaccessible walkways / pathways; inaccessible signage (for dyslexic learners).
- Lack of in-house expertise in relation to technology, especially new and emerging technologies for adaptive technology.

- Time and resource required for new students as well as staff to gain expertise in using adaptive technology.
- Lack of resource to advance wider, longer term solutions to accessibility such as Universal Design for Learning practices.

**Initiatives developed recently to support disabled learners**

Twenty three TEIs described recent initiatives developed to support disabled learners. Some TEI's included responses developed in 2020 in response to Covid-19. Examples of the initiatives are:

- Assistive technology being more widely introduced, and more learners supported to use it:
    - Replaced note takers with Sonocent Audionotetaker (reduced use of note takers by 82%)
    - Glean software introduced to support virtual learning for disabled learners
    - Introduced read and write software
    - Purchased Blackboard Ally to support academic staff to develop and provide more accessible online resources
- Delivery of remote disability support services via virtual platforms:
    - Phone and zoom meetings – proved popular with disabled learners who had previously been required to attend face to face meetings, which for many is difficult
    - Training readers/writers to work in the virtual space
    - Online dyslexia screening
- Learning using digital platforms
    - Working with teaching staff to be more aware and engaged with their online learning spaces, including updating guidance on online accessibility considerations and working with teaching and learning circle on universal design for learning
    - Developed guidelines for academic staff to create disability inclusive online courses
- More mentors and flexibility of staff availability according to student needs
- Using note-takers to provide pastoral check-ins
- Disability Awareness raising sessions for staff, supported by disabled learners as voice of lived experience
- Developed new guidance for all staff for supporting distressed students
- Identified external providers who came in train staff on suicide awareness and prevention
- Actively increased links to external providers in community, positive for learners (regional TEI)

*It was encouraging to see the innovations being undertaken at TEI's to support disabled learners, and the opportunity to share these innovations across the sector via this report is valuable.*

*If TEI's wish to know more about any of these initiatives, please contact the Ōritetanga team at the TEC – we can link you with the relevant TEI for information / support.*

**Highlights/successes in supporting disabled learners**

Twenty four TEIs described highlights or successes in supporting disabled learners in 2019. Some TEI's included successes experienced in 2020 as a result of Covid-19 practice changes. Successes and highlights included:

- Many TEI's reported that seeing disabled learners engage, grow in confidence, integrate into classes and succeed in their learning journey was a key highlight.
- Several TEI's reported increased and improved case management with better outcomes as a highlight.

- Several TEI's reported success in making campus buildings, rooms and equipment more accessible, and adding accessible toilets.
- Several TEI's reported more data insights into the performance of disabled learners, enabling them to lobby for resources/support.
- The Implementation of the Marrakesh Treaty, making access to electronic texts much easier (Jan 2020)
- Building extensive relationships across regional sites and learning centres as well as in the community significantly improved pathways into and within the learning environment for disabled learners.
- Provided Dyslexia and Irlens testing free of charge.
- The provision of multiple support / referral options within an internal team meant greater collaboration with colleagues and students given a choice of support avenues internally.
- Use of an internal staff member to complete dyslexia assessments ensured timely results and enabled students prompt access to the equipment and exam support they required.
- Greater presence of collaborative work with schools during initial enrolment and assessment adaptation that was shared within a teaching / learning forum.
- (Disability services) registered learners retention rates in 2019 was 96%. This is up from 94% in 2018 and 88% in 2017.
- Disabled learners who received support from disability support services had a 10% higher completion rate than disabled learners who did not receive any support. Māori disabled learners who received support had an 18% higher completion rate than those who did not receive any support.
- Disabled learners retained at higher rate than overall learner cohort.
- Linked disability declaration on enrolment to notify disability services immediately for outreach (used to be a manual process).
- The Disability Support team received additional hours in 2019 (when we hired an Occupational Therapist). This has helped further improving the services.
- A goal for 2019 was to provide an improved, targeted, coordinated and proactive approach to learning support for students with a disability at all campuses. To achieve this goal the Equity Facilitator would collaborate with the Engagement Facilitators (colleagues in the wider student support team) across all three campuses to ensure that the needs of students and staff at these campuses were well communicated and face to face visits were timely and well planned. The number of students who engage with Equity Services at each campus has increased as a result of this practice change.
- Two new scholarships were made available for learners with disabilities.
- Implementation of new workshops for learners with learning differences (such as dyslexia), one for starting in study and one for learners about to graduate - " Going into the professional workforce with dyslexia".
- Increased participation of Deaf / hearing impaired students and the provision of additional budget by the University to support these students.
- Increased participation from disabled learner cohort in the Student Ambassador programme.
- Introduced PEEP - Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan for students with mobility constraints.
- Funding of external learning assessments for first diagnosis.
- Provided NZSL classes for 76 staff and learners.
- Funded external learning assessments for first diagnosis.
- In 2019 developed a new position- SME Disability to provide advice, policy support, and best-practice procedures to enhance our disability expertise, confidence and offerings,

leading to a substantial increase in tauira accessing Disability Services in 2019 compared to 2018.

*We were very pleased to hear that more TEI's are looking to improve their case management and wider support structures for disabled learners. We are also heartened by the focus on data, which TEI's have reflected both in their project work and through the improved data provided for the 2019 reporting. Better data on disabled people's current position and outcomes is key focus for the NZ Disability Action Plan, so development in this area is very positive. It is also heartening to hear TEI's are providing support and training to staff to build up their capacity and confidence to support disabled learners, no matter their day-to-day role.*

*The detailed information provided by the 24 TEI's who reported Challenges, Highlights and Successes with their disabled learners will make a valuable contribution to work being undertaken by the TEC and MOE. This information will help inform work on the Unified Funding System, conversations around a need for potential additional funding for high investment learners, and the re-development of Kia Ōrite.*

*If TEI's wish to know more about any of these initiatives, please contact the Ōritetanga team at the TEC – we can link you with the relevant TEI for information / support.*

**Next steps for *equity funding for disabled learners* reporting work…**

*Cross sector work*

The TEC will continue to work with TEO's[3], 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.

*2020 reporting and beyond*

Reporting for the 2020 year will help TEC and MOE better understand the impacts of the first 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 TEI's, and how they are being supported.

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

*Support for the sector: Kia Orite – a guide for supporting disabled learners in an inclusive tertiary environment*

The re-development of Kia Ōrite is a key part of the TEC's commitment to support disabled learners. It will support TEO's to standardise their practices, learn from each other, and understand what is expected from learners and their whanau. The base version of Kia Ōrite will be available in April 2021. TEC will continue to add to Kia Ōrite through 2021 and 2022 with training and development material in the pipeline.

[3] While the current report covers TEI's only (as they receive equity funding for disabled learners) TEC's work in the disability space applies to all tertiary providers, including private training establishments and all industry training funded by the TEC.