

Te Rito

Insights from learners and staff
– opportunities to enhance
success for Te Pūkenga disabled
learners

Part Three

Ākonga at the Centre research project

August 2021



Matakōrero | Foreword

Te Pūkenga is inspired by the base of the harakeke (the flax bush) – the strongest part, from where all threads meet and grow. The 'rito' is the inner shoot of the harakeke. In the same way, our learners and their whānau must be at the centre of what we do across Te Pūkenga and vocational learning.

The Ākonga at the Centre research project was undertaken in late 2020 and involved a small research team that travelled across Aotearoa to gain insights directly from our learners and those who support them. Particular attention was made to learners who have traditionally been underserved by the system, and the enablers and barriers to learner success.

This report builds on Te Rito Parts One and Two and presents analysis of the voices of disabled learners and the staff who support them. The Ākonga at the Centre project enlisted the expertise of Grant Cleland to ensure the voices of disabled learners were honoured. This report identifies opportunities to enhance success for disabled learners.

Alongside Te Rito reports, a suite of learner and staff persona assist Te Pūkenga network to plan and assist effective decision-making to ensure we are transforming our system to achieve equitable outcomes for all learners and their whānau.

Acknowledging those who were involved in this important work

We acknowledge the many stories shared with us; their insights will be treated as taonga. We sincerely thank participants for sharing their experiences and aspirations with us. We thank our team of researchers for maintaining the mana of all participants and allowing us to share this information as a resource for our network, and others, to strengthen our collective efforts towards a more learner-centred network.

In particular, we would like to thank:

- our learners for gifting their stories and experience
- the staff, whānau, employers, and communities supporting learners
- the 38 members of the learner-centred design staff forum, representing our subsidiaries and transitional Industry Training Organisations for co-designing and activating engagement across Aotearoa
- Our research and analysis teams and in particular, Grant Cleland

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity ahead of us. This report contains insights into what disabled learners, and the staff who support them, believe are the opportunities to enhance their success.

On behalf of our Te Pūkenga whānau, ngā mihi.
Hāpaitia te ara tika ka pūmau ai te rangatiratanga mō ngā uri whakaheke.



Stephen Town
Chief Executive



Tania Winslade
Deputy Chief Executive
Learner Journey and Experience

Cover Design: 'Determined and able' depicts one of artist Pip Hartley's interpretations of the learner insights gained from this project.

Acknowledgements from the author

This analysis has been produced with the generous assistance of many people throughout Aotearoa New Zealand. We particularly wish to thank the many disabled learners and support staff who provided their very valuable feedback about their experiences of vocational education in New Zealand. We are grateful for your honesty and for taking time out of your busy lives to provide feedback.

This feedback has been divided into key themes to assist Te Pūkenga to find solutions (enablers) to resolve the many barriers that disabled learners and support staff spoke about in the various focus groups around the country.

It will also be used to assist Te Pūkenga to identify ways to improve the participation and achievement of disabled learners in vocational education. It is exciting that disabled learners are now one of three priority learner groups alongside Māori and Pasifika learners. For too long disabled learners have been the forgotten group who struggle in a 'disabling' education system that often doesn't consider the impairment-related learning support needs of disabled learners.

Many of the environmental barriers identified in this report by disabled learners and support staff are of major concern and must be addressed.

Twenty-four percent of our community have an impairment lasting six months or more and for too long disabled learners have faced significant barriers to their participation, achievement and pathway into vocational education and employment.

By putting the needs of disabled learners at the very centre, we have a real opportunity to increase access for all, and finally, ensure equity for disabled learners.

However, this will only occur if we are willing to listen to what the disabled learners and staff have told us. We must take action to resolve the barriers that disabled learners currently face.

Grant Cleland
Creative Solutions Disability Consultancy

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1 Whakarāpopototanga | Executive summary

We are grateful to the current disabled learners and their support staff who provided valuable feedback about their experiences of vocational education in Aotearoa.

This very honest feedback has been divided into key insights to assist Te Pūkenga to find solutions to resolve the eight key barriers that disabled learners and support staff have identified.

It is exciting that disabled learners are now one of three priority learner groups alongside Māori and Pacific learners. For too long disabled learners have been the forgotten group. Struggling in a 'disabling' education system that often doesn't consider their impairment-related learning support needs, despite 24 percent of our community having an impairment lasting six months or more.

By putting the needs of disabled learners at the very centre, Te Pūkenga has a real opportunity to finally ensure equity for disabled learners. However, this will only occur if we are willing to listen to what the disabled learners and their support staff have told us. We must take action to resolve the barriers that disabled learners face.

Disabled learners have told us in this report that when they receive the right impairment-related learning support it makes a huge difference to their academic achievement and life in general:

'I put my heart and soul into my assignments and received good marks. I now know I have good ideas and my voice and opinions are worth something.'

'The biggest thing I've taken away from studying is that I am not dumb and incapable after all.'

'People need to believe in me and see that I can do it.'

Support staff think that for more disabled learners to have this opportunity:

'Disability needs to be more recognised as an equity group. It needs more focus on the system and how we promote disability achievement.'

According to Statistic NZ and the Tertiary Education Commission, disabled learners are one of the most educationally disadvantaged groups in Aotearoa. However, in 2019 the Tertiary Education Commission found that if disabled

learners get the right support, they are equally likely to complete their post-secondary qualification as non-disabled people.

So why are so few disabled people attaining formal qualifications or accessing vocational and tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand?

Learning environments are essentially designed for non-disabled students that create barriers for some academically capable disabled learners. If their impairment-related learning support needs are not considered in teaching, learning and assessment and there is no infrastructure to support them and their teaching staff, disabled learners will face barriers to their participation and achievement in vocational education.

'Despite struggling from the beginning of school right through until the end nobody picked up on my obvious difficulties ... If this was picked up, support put into place, and accommodations made my life could have turned out very different.'

The feedback received from current disabled learners and their support staff provides an honest insight into the barriers that they face and the solutions or enablers they suggest creating an inclusive vocational environment, where the staff who support them feel 'disability confident.'

This will only occur if people at all levels of the vocational education system take responsibility for supporting disabled learners. Historically, tertiary education providers have tended to delegate support of disabled learners to their staff within Disability Support Services.

There needs to be a top-down approach to supporting disabled learners, otherwise:

- disabled learners will stay on the margins despite being one of the largest equity groups
- Disability Support Services will become overwhelmed as the number of disabled learners enrolling in vocational education increases
- many teaching and other staff who support disabled learners will lack the 'disability confidence' to create a fully inclusive teaching, learning and assessment environment.

The analysis of feedback from current disabled learners and their support staff has identified the following barriers and enablers:

1. Lack of disability awareness from teaching and other staff

Enablers to Resolve this Barrier:

- Staff understand the educational barriers disabled learners face
- Support from lecturers with inclusive teaching practice, learning support and assessment
- Staff see the benefits of vocational training for disabled learners.

2. Issues impacting on disabled learners receiving the right learning support

- a. Lack of learning support
- b. Lack of Information about courses, academic requirements or learning support
- c. Delayed learning support
- d. Lack of learning support or flexibility with assessments and exams
- e. Lack of learning support because of no diagnosis or funding for assessments
- f. Inconsistent Covid-19 response and the difficulties with online learning
- g. Disability Support Services (DSS) staff being overwhelmed by the increasing demand for their services
- h. The difficulties of having part-time or limited DSS staff.

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers:

- All staff taking responsibility for supporting disabled learners rather than delegating this to DSS Staff
- All tertiary providers contacting disabled learners at enrolment
- Providing the right impairment-related learning support
- Focusing on what a disabled learner is good at
- Staff valuing the skills of disabled learners.

3. Some disabled learners are reluctant to associate with DSS or provide impairment information

- a. Being scared to provide personal information about their impairment or seek help
- b. Fear that they will be treated similar to how they were treated at school.

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers:

- Creating a safe environment to associate with DSS or provide impairment information. The key to disabled learners providing personal information about their disability or impairment is creating a 'safe environment' for them to overcome their fear about how this information will be used, and how they will be treated if they provide this information. If disabled learners understand the purpose of asking for this information and how it will be used, they are far more likely to provide it.

4. Some disabled learners are feeling overwhelmed

- a. Feeling overwhelmed about their ability to do further study and some classroom activities
- b. Lack of support from peers.

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers:

- More support for students experiencing mental health issues
- More support from staff when a disabled learner is struggling
- Assistance from staff with peer support.

5. Financial hardship and lack of funding for impairment-related learning support

- a. Poverty and financial hardship for some disabled learners
- b. Lack of funding for disability-related learning support, particularly for those with high support needs.

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers:

- Increasing funding for learning support for disabled learners with high support needs
- Supporting disabled learners with course fees and other costs, and better financial information to make informed decisions about studying
- Considering Financial Allowances and withdrawal policies to meet disabled learner needs.

6. Lack of Employment Pathways for disabled learners

- a. Lack of Academic Pathways leading to employment or further study
- b. Lack of Employment Opportunities for disabled learners.

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers:

- Resolving the barriers to Academic Pathways for some disabled learners
- Introducing more Employment Pathways through internships and course work placements.

7. Inaccessible Communication and Information:

- a. Lack of information about courses, academic requirements, or available learning support for disabled learners in accessible formats
- b. Inaccessible digital platforms and computer technology
- c. Lack of access to computer devices, Wi-Fi and data can be a huge barrier for some disabled learners on low incomes.

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers:

- Accessing information and communication that considers that there are disabled learners who require information and communication in alternative formats
- Developing the computer literacy skills of all disabled learners.

8. Inaccessible physical environment for disabled learners:

- a. Elevators can be an issue for some disabled learners and not all parts of campuses are accessible - heavy doors, inaccessible buildings, and steep sites.

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers:

- Disabled learners visiting a campus prior to enrolment to determine any barriers to physical access and access routes
- Developing a Physical Access Plan and committing funds each year to a prioritised list of physical access provisions, in partnership with disabled learners and support staff
- Completing regular physical access audits.

The Way Forward

The Kia Ōrite Toolkit has been developed by the Tertiary Education Commission and Achieve and includes a range of tools to assist tertiary education providers to develop Disability Action Plans. Until this occurs disabled learners will continue to experience the various barriers in the vocational education system that are described in this report.

Disability Action Plans should be developed in partnership with disabled learners with different impairments. These learners should be active partners in the development and review of building designs, course content, teaching practices, information and communication processes and learning support, which will save vocational providers time and money in the longer term. It will provide them with valuable insights that they may not have considered in their design and planning. Vocational providers that don't have mandated representative disabled student groups should be encouraged to establish these, rather than consulting with individual disabled learners.

Staff within vocational education should be provided with guidance and training on the use of non-discriminatory practices. These staff need to be aware of their legal obligations under the Human Rights Act, the Privacy Act and Health and Disability Commission Code of Rights.

According to the Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Ombudsman (2019), individual requests for reasonable accommodations must be considered constructively and careful thought should be given as to whether any modifications can be made to assist disabled learners to participate for example in a course of study. Every reasonable effort should be made to accommodate disabled learners, and in circumstances where this is not practical, alternative options should be explored.

To conclude, a fully inclusive and equitable vocational education system recognises, and values disabled learners.

To achieve this, the following actions are recommended:

1. Develop and Implement Disability Action Plans at both the strategic and provider levels of the vocational education system, using the Kia Ōrite Toolkit.
2. Develop a consistent infrastructure across the vocational education system for supporting disabled learners. This should enable all staff to be 'disability confident' and make it easy to provide effective learning support for disabled learners with different impairments.
3. Require all providers in the vocational education system to ask questions at enrolment that identify those disabled learners who require learning support. Guidelines for creating a safe environment for disabled learners are also developed and implemented consistently.
4. Review whether disabled learners should require a diagnosis if they have obvious learning support needs.
5. Develop nationally consistent policies, procedures, and guidelines for teaching and other staff for supporting disabled learners with online learning.
6. Require all providers to establish and work in partnership with representative disabled student associations and groups.
7. Review the funding model for paying for learning support for those with high support needs.
8. Negotiate national bulk assessment arrangements for those disabled learners who require an assessment or diagnosis.

9. Develop policies and procedures so disabled learners are not disadvantaged financially if they study part-time, withdraw, or don't pass all their courses due to an impairment.
10. Complete further research and develop consistent systems for reporting information about current disabled learners from different impairment groups.
11. Require providers to implement the Ministry of Social Development 'Accessibility Charter' programme, as part of their Disability Action Plan,
12. Develop strategies to improve the digital and computer literacy skills and access to devices, Wi-Fi, and data of disabled learners.
13. Require all vocational providers to develop a Physical Access Plan, complete regular physical access audits and commit funds to improve physical access, in partnership with disabled learners and disability support staff.
14. Recommend the Ministry of Education develops solutions to resolve the significant issues raised by some disabled learners about the lack of learning support and their treatment at secondary school. One remedy would be to require all high schools to develop a Disability Action Plan, based on the Kia Ōrite Toolkit.

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2 Te Tāhuhu Kōrero | Background

Disabled learners are one of the most educationally disadvantaged groups within Aotearoa. They face many barriers to their academic achievement in secondary, vocational education and employment that must be identified and removed.

2013–2020 Statistic NZ Census and Household Labour Force Information indicates that:^{1 2 3 4}

Twenty-four percent of our total population has an impairment lasting 6 months or more, the rate of impairment increases with age, so with our ageing population we will have an increasing number of disabled people in our community.

Māori are more likely to have impairments and have higher disability rates in all age groups than any other ethnic groups, despite their young age profile.

Disabled people are less likely than non-disabled people to hold a formal qualification. In June 2018, 59.6 percent of disabled people held a formal qualification, compared with 83.2 percent of non-disabled people, a gap of 23.6 percent and 19.5 percent for those aged 15-64 years.

In June 2020, 48.2 percent of young disabled people (15–24 years) were not in employment, education, or training, compared with 10.6 percent for non-disabled youth.

Between 2012 and 2017⁵ only 2 percent of disabled people gained a bachelors or higher qualification compared to 8 percent of non-disabled people. However, of the disabled learners enrolled in bachelor or higher

¹ Statistics New Zealand. (2013). *Labour Market findings from the 2013 New Zealand Census*. Wellington, New Zealand: Statistics New Zealand.

² Statistics New Zealand. (2020). *The disability gap 2018*. Wellington, New Zealand: Statistics New Zealand.

³ Statistics New Zealand. (2020). *Disability Status: The findings from the 2018 New Zealand Census*. Wellington, New Zealand: Statistics New Zealand.

⁴ Statistics New Zealand. (2020). *Measuring inequality for disabled New Zealanders: 2018*. Wellington, New Zealand: Statistics New Zealand.

⁵ Tertiary Education Commission. (2019). *TEC Info Sheet: Education and employment outcomes for disabled people*. Tertiary Education Commission. p. 1-2.

qualifications, 58 percent completed their qualification, a rate similar to their non-disabled peers.

Disabled people are less likely than non-disabled people to be employed by a significant margin, a gap of 39.6 percent (December 2020: 38.7 percent vs 78.3 percent of those 15-64 years).

Education and employment outcomes are much worse for Māori disabled people when compared to any other ethnic group.

Disabled people are more likely to work part-time, mostly in manual, low skilled and low-income jobs and are under-represented in higher-income occupations.

In the past, it has been reported that disabled people with qualifications were employed at the same rate as non-disabled people without qualifications.

These education and employment outcomes are far worse for disabled people when compared with other equity groups.

In 2013, 74 percent of disabled people not employed wanted a job.

In 2019 the Tertiary Education Commission⁶ found that if disabled learners get the right support, they are likely to complete their post-secondary qualification as equally as non-disabled people. The difference in completion rates at bachelor and all other levels, compared with non-disabled learners, was not statistically significant.

So why are so few disabled people attaining formal qualifications or accessing vocational and tertiary education in Aotearoa?

Learning environments are essentially designed for non-disabled students and create barriers for some academically capable disabled learners. If their impairment-related learning support needs are not considered in teaching, learning and assessment, and there is no infrastructure to support them and their teaching staff, disabled learners will face barriers to their participation and achievement in vocational education.

The feedback that we have received from current disabled learners and the staff that support them provides an honest insight into the barriers that they

⁶ Tertiary Education Commission. (2019). TEC Info sheet: Education and employment outcomes for disabled people. Tertiary Education Commission. p. 1-2.

face. They also suggest solutions to enable these ākonga to participate in a fully inclusive vocational environment, where the staff who support them with teaching, learning and assessment feel 'disability confident.'

If Te Pūkenga is serious about ensuring equity of access for disabled learners in vocational education, it must:

- dismantle 'disabling' environments,
- identify and resolve discriminatory practices that prevent the success of disabled learners in vocational education, and
- recognise that diversity is fundamental to the ongoing sustainability of vocational education.

This will only occur if people at all levels of vocational education take responsibility for supporting disabled learners. Historically tertiary education providers have tended to delegate support of disabled learners to the staff at Disability Support Services.

With the increasing number of disabled learners enrolling in vocational education and the environmental barriers that they face, there needs to be a top-down approach to supporting disabled learners. This will require all staff involved with teaching, learning and assessment to become 'disability confident' so that they can create an inclusive environment for disabled learners. There will also need to be the infrastructure to support them so that they can confidently and effectively support these disabled learners.

If Te Pūkenga is serious about improving the participation and achievement of disabled learners in vocational education, all Workforce Development Councils and their senior leadership teams need to take responsibility for developing the infrastructure for this to occur.

Without this focus:

- disabled learners will stay on the margins despite being one of the largest equity groups
- Disability Support Services will become overwhelmed as the number of disabled learners enrolling in vocational education increases
- many teaching and other staff who support disabled learners will lack the 'disability confidence' to create a fully inclusive teaching, learning and assessment environment.

Who are disabled learners?^{7 8}

The New Zealand Disability Strategy states that 'disability is not something individuals have. What individuals have are impairments. They may be physical, sensory, neurological, psychiatric, learning, or other impairments.'

Instead, 'disability is the process which happens when one group of people creates barriers by designing a world only for their way of living, taking no account of the impairments other people have.'

In this report we have used the New Zealand Disability Strategy definition of disability, which embraces the Social Model of Disability.⁹

We use the term 'disabled learners' to emphasise that people with impairments are often 'disabled by their environment,' rather than inferring that they are 'disabled' themselves.

- Disabled learners face many barriers in the education system.
- Teaching and other staff with negative attitudes, who don't believe disabled learners are able to achieve formal qualifications or a job.
- Disabling learning environments where their impairment-related learning support needs have not been considered in teaching, learning and assessment.
- The lack of physical, communication and information access or support funding for some disabled learners and this impacting on their ability to participate and/or achieve at school or vocational education.

Massey University's research into Enabling Participation for Young People with Ableism (see Appendix C) provides an insight into the barriers that young disabled people face in Aotearoa.

⁷ Ministry of Social Development. (2016). *New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016–2026*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Social Development. Pg. 12-13.

⁸ Ministry of Health. (2001). *The New Zealand disability strategy: Making a world of difference*. Whakanui oranga. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Health. p. 1.

⁹ *We acknowledge the different viewpoints that exist with regard to the language around disability. The language we have chosen fits with the social model of disability. By referring to Disabled Learners, and to the interaction between the student with the impairment and the vocational environment as creating disability, we separate out what can be changed. This is a useful tool for creating an inclusive environment.*

Disabled learners include:

- those with permanent impairments
- those with impairments resulting from long or short-term injury or illness,
- the Deaf community, and
- those with learning disability, neurological or cognitive difficulties, mental health conditions and other hidden impairments.

These impairments often last for six months or more.

It is also important to remember that disabled learners are diverse like the rest of our community. They include Māori disabled learners, those with different impairments, those from other cultural groups, women, international students, LGBTQIA communities, migrants, at-risk youth, older people, etc.

We recognise that there will be some disabled people who will not be comfortable with the use of the term 'disabled learners' and would prefer 'people with disability' or nothing at all.

Language is important and we respect these differences. It can also provide meaning and context and we have chosen to use 'disabled learners' to emphasise that these ākonga are often 'disabled' by their environment.

Why must we achieve equity?

*Disabled Learners have a right to education
and employment and to realise their potential.*

Education enhances our lives and our society. A fully inclusive vocational education system is one that recognises and values diversity and enables wide-ranging participation by offering flexible learning pathways to the 24 percent of New Zealanders who have an impairment.

There has been some progress in vocational education towards tertiary education providers recognising that diversity is fundamental to their ongoing sustainability, as they seek to ensure equity for all members of society. However, the earlier statistics show many disabled learners are still struggling to access and achieve in our education system, despite being part of one of the largest equity groups.

United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities ¹⁰

Aotearoa had signed up to the United Nations (UN) Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. It sets out what is required to implement existing human rights as they relate to disabled people.

New Zealand was a leader in negotiating this convention. Every government that has ratified this convention must provide the UN with regular progress reports on implementation and our progress is regularly monitored.

Article 24 - Education states the following:

Ensure an inclusive education system at all levels and lifelong learning.

As a signatory to this convention New Zealand is expected to take these steps:

- Develop human potential
- Disabled people are not excluded from the education system, on the basis of disability
- Ensure reasonable accommodations are provided
- Disabled people receive the support required, within the general education system, to facilitate their effective education
- Effective individualised support measures are provided that maximize academic and social development
- Enable disabled people to learn life and social skills for their full and equal participation in education and the community
- Ensure disabled people can access general tertiary education, vocational training, adult education, and lifelong learning on an equal basis, including ensuring reasonable accommodations.

Access to education for disabled learners is one of the areas that the UN would like to see the New Zealand Government making more progress on.

¹⁰ NZ Office for Disability Issues (2021): <https://www.odi.govt.nz/united-nations-convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/>

New Zealand Disability Strategy

The 2016 - 2026 New Zealand Disability Strategy¹¹ adopted a vision of a more inclusive society for disabled people by eliminating barriers that prevent disabled people from participating and contributing fully to society. This strategy includes eight priority outcomes for change and includes an action plan linked to the UN Convention.

The education outcome for disabled people in this strategy is:

'We get an excellent education and achieve our potential throughout our lives.'

The Strategy describes the educational aspiration of disabled people:

- Our learning pathway supports us to develop friendships and social skills, as well as resilience, determination, and confidence.
- All education services are welcoming and provide a great inclusive education for us.
- We have trained teachers and educators who support and believe in our progress and achievement, and value our contribution to the learning environment.
- Education supports our personal, academic and social development.
- We are treated with respect and dignity by those around us in the education system, including our peers and those who teach and support us.
- As we move on to tertiary and life-long learning, the transition periods are smooth, with the right information and supports available at the right time.

The Government recognises that New Zealand's economic growth and improved social outcomes depend on equal access and equal opportunities for all learners, including disabled learners. Two research projects in recent years have shown that if disabled people had the same rate of employment as the general population there would be a \$1.1-1.45 billion annual benefit to the economy.¹² Vocational education lays the foundation for this.

¹¹ Ministry of Social Development (2016). *New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016–2026*. Wellington, New Zealand: Ministry of Social Development. Pg. 24.

¹² Cleland, G., Allen & Clarke. (2016). *A Billion Dollar Opportunity: The Potential Benefits of Equal Employment for Disabled People in New Zealand*. Wellington: Workbridge National Office.

NZIER (2017). *Valuing access to work An NZIER report commissioned by the Blind Foundation for the Access Alliance*.

Rather than seeing disabled people as a cost to society we need to take an investment approach and support them to succeed. Vocational education has a role in achieving this.

It is time for all tertiary providers to see the value of disabled learners. From 2022 the Tertiary Education Commission will be moving to require tertiary providers to develop a Disability Action Plan to eliminate barriers in all areas of campus life for disabled learners.

The Kia Ōrite Toolkit has been developed and includes various tools to assist tertiary education providers, including those in vocational education, to develop Disability Action Plans. Until this occurs disabled learners will continue to experience the various barriers in the vocational education system that are described in the following sections.

3 Rangahau | Methodology

The research drew on both a human-centred design approach and a critical bicultural framework ([Panapa, 2015](#)).

Human-centred design is an approach:

- with a focus on people to gain a deep and holistic understanding of needs – in this context understanding the needs across the entire learner journey and the connection between behaviours, pressures, pain points, motivations, and aspirations
- to ensure core, root issues are solved, not just the problem/symptom presented
- a systems point of view
- which continually tests and refines responses to data to ensure they meet the needs of people for whom they are intended
- which is not restricted by knowledge and takes into account real people in real environments.

A Te Tiriti-informed critical bicultural framework was also applied to guide how Te Pūkenga could excel at transforming our approach and meeting the needs of Māori learners and their whānau. This framework also responds to the unique needs of all learners, including those who have been traditionally under-served, including Pacific and disabled learners.

Approach to focus group research

- 45 focus group sessions were held across Aotearoa, each 60-90 minutes
- They involved campus, online, work-based learners, and the staff who support them. Some included community and prospective learners (high school or community)
- Over 300 participants produced over 3,000 narratives (statements) which were analysed and grouped by theme, resulting in 283 key insights and 74 opportunity statements.
- All data was analysed using the human-centred design analysis approach of affinity mapping, bringing together similar narratives to form a cluster. Each cluster of narratives was analysed, finding the most common words used by the voices. The authenticity of voice and sentiment was premised by developing insight statements using the most frequently used words.
- 1,500 narratives from Māori learners and Māori staff who support Māori learners, were then extracted and analysed using a critical bicultural framework (refer to Section 2).

- The voices of Ākonga Māori, kaimahi Māori and hāpori Māori were lifted from the 'all' voices to enable the data to be specifically analysed and interpreted through Māori lenses. A small team of Māori researchers was assembled to focus on and enable a Māori collective lens to the analysis. The critical bicultural framework identified high-level themes that relate specifically to the aspirations and experiences of Māori. From there the narratives informed the set of opportunities that speak to success for Māori.

Approach to this analysis

The Social Model of Disability, a key part of the UN Convention and NZ Disability Strategy, was used as the framework for analysing the feedback from disabled learners and staff.

This involved identifying:

- environmental barriers that impact the participation and achievement of disabled learners in vocational education in Aotearoa.
- enablers that would resolve these barriers and improve access to teaching, assessment and learning support of disabled learners, and build the 'disability confidence' of staff.

Using Miro (visual collaboration software) to analyse the feedback, key themes were developed, using some earlier work for Te Pūkenga which formed the basis of thinking for this analysis.

For example, with the review of high-level insights of disabled learners for the future service concepts, the following key themes were developed:

Environmental Barriers

- Teaching, assessment and learning support which is not accessible to disabled learners
- Insights for specific impairment groups; lack of educational and employment pathways for people with learning (intellectual) disability.
- Inaccessible communication, information, and physical access for disabled learners
- Negative attitudes and discriminatory practices of teaching and other staff towards disabled learners, and the impact on these learners
- Digital and online platforms that are inaccessible to disabled learners and lack assistive technology such as screen readers, etc.

- Lack of learning support for disabled learners without diagnosis
- Staff who do not feel 'disability confident' and unable to provide an accessible teaching, learning and assessment environment.

Enablers

- Inclusive teaching, assessment and learning support solutions that are accessible to disabled learners with a range of different impairments, including those without diagnosis
- Staff training to build their 'disability confidence' with their teaching, assessment and learning support which is accessible to disabled learners
- Digital and online platforms accessible to assistive technology of disabled learners
- Guidelines for accessible information, communication, and personal disability information
- Creating 'disability confident employers' supporting disabled learners
- Employment Pathways and Internships for disabled learners and within Te Pūkenga.

This analysis has some limitations. Many comments from disabled learners, and the people who support them, do not include the disability or impairment group that the comments or quotes relate to. There is also a lack of New Zealand statistics or research about disabled learners and the barriers facing different impairment groups and enablers to compare against. However, many issues identified in this report are consistent with feedback from disabled learners and support staff, obtained through the development of the Kia Ōrite toolkit.

Kaitiakitanga – Please use with care

The approach we have taken during this research is to treat the narratives and data as taonga. It is important to remember that this data belongs to those from who it has been sourced, in this case our learners. Use of the data therefore needs to represent our learners in ways that enable them to maintain their 'mana,' dignity, and agency. It must be used in an empowering way to avoid framing learners in negative ways. Great care and responsibility should be taken in the management and protection of both the data and the stories we tell from it.

Te Rito also imbues responsibilities to collectives of participants. Māori data, in particular, is also the domain of Māori collective ownership. Te Pūkenga responses to the data must also respond to Māori expectations of kaitiakitanga

over Māori collective data sets. Use of Māori data should be done in partnership with Māori. Please use this information with care.

If in doubt, please contact Te Pūkenga Learner Journey and Experience team. Some helpful guidance can be found at www.tec.govt.nz/teo/working-with-teos/analysing-student-data/ethics-framework/

4 Ngā mea hāpai, ngā taupā me ngā huarahi i tohua | Key enablers, barriers and opportunities identified

This section sets out key insights and opportunity statements produced from focus group sessions with disabled learners and staff who support them. Feedback from current disabled learners and their support staff in vocational education has identified the following barriers and enablers.

Appendix A sets out the statements (quotations) from learners and staff who support them for each of the opportunity statements.

<p>Opportunity 1</p>	<p>Lack of disability awareness from teaching and other staff: When there is a lack of 'disability confidence' among staff, the educational barriers that disabled learners face are not understood, learners are often not provided with the right impairment-related learning support and their skills can be undervalued. Under the Human Rights Act, if a tertiary provider declines enrolment to a course on the grounds of disability or fails to provide 'reasonable accommodations' in a teaching environment without justification, this could constitute discrimination.</p> <p>When staff are 'disability confident' they are more willing to provide inclusive practices, be flexible and to offer the right impairment-related learning support, so disabled learners can achieve their academic potential.</p>
	<p>How might Te Pūkenga staff become more 'disability confident' to provide impairment-related learning support for disabled learners?</p>

1.1 Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

'When I came here the support and teacher's understanding was lacking. It's only after a year that they've only just started to try and help out.'
Staff say, 'I can't have this person - this is a health and safety issue, or you can't have disabled learners in this course.'

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- disabled learners being undervalued
- not provided the right learning support
- staff not aware of the barriers that they are creating or that disabled learners face.
- teaching staff who do not want disabled learners on their courses.

Under the Human Rights Act, if a tertiary provider declines enrolment to a course on the grounds of disability or fails to provide 'reasonable accommodation' in a teaching environment, without assessing how a disabled learner could complete a course with impairment-related learning supports, this could constitute discrimination.

Providing guidance and training for all teaching and other staff on the use of non-discriminatory and inclusive practices is an essential part of creating an inclusive environment for disabled learners and overcoming their barriers to participation and achievement.

1.2 Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

Staff understanding the educational barriers disabled learners face:

'Lots of operations have sometimes interrupted my study and made me feel left behind.'

'Chill spaces - when someone is anxious, and they have to leave class and chill for a bit ...' (Student with Anxiety and Autism)

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- The types of educational barriers that disabled learners face - time off due to operations and medical appointments, physical access, the difficulties getting up early for lectures when you use a wheelchair and have personal carers for showering and transport, the need for timeout spaces on campus when you get anxious, getting up early for classes when you take medication at night to help you sleep because of a mental illness, poverty when you are on a benefit.
- It is important that staff understand these types of issues and are willing and flexible with support, such as offering online or recorded lectures.

Support from lecturers - inclusive teaching practice, learning support and assessment:

'Professional Development for lecturers should be on supporting us better ... they should do better for (disabled learners).'

'We have some staff who are keen and able. We have some staff who don't know what they ought to be doing - we are trying to get support in place for them.'

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- disabled learners want lecturers to have more professional development on inclusive teaching practice, learning support and assessment
- talking with tutors about learning support can make a big difference
- staff want more professional development, and this builds their 'disability confidence.'

Staff seeing the benefits of vocational training for disabled learners:

'I dropped out of school and was sad for a year, and now I am confident and can leave the house ... I would feel confident to advocate for myself now.'
'(Student with anxiety and autism)

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- There are many positive outcomes from vocational education for disabled learners - more confidence and overcoming issues like anxiety, identifying their strengths, building their independence, hope, financial security, and a future.

Opportunity 2	<p>Issues impacting on disabled learners receiving the right learning support:</p> <p>Current disabled learners and their support staff indicate that various barriers are impacting on disabled learners receiving the right impairment-related learning support.</p> <p>When disabled learners don't receive the right impairment-related learning support, this has a significant impact on their ability to achieve their academic potential.</p> <p>When disabled learners receive the right learning support this makes a huge difference and allows them to achieve their academic potential.</p>
	<p><i>How might Te Pūkenga disabled learners receive the right impairment-related learning support to achieve their academic potential and that resolve the barriers to learning that they face?</i></p>

2.1 Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Lack of learning support:

'More learning advisors and space for support. We have to book weeks ahead ...'

'There should be more support for people with disabilities in mainstream courses.'

'... Sometimes it takes 2-5 times more than an able person but there aren't time allowances.' (Disabled learner using a wheelchair)

'The ability to get student support in place early is very important.'

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- more learning advisors are needed in some locations
- some disabled learners don't feel they are listened to
- impairment-related learning supports not being offered to disabled learners when required
- staff believe learning support for disabled learners at an early stage is essential.

Lack of Information about courses, academic requirements, or available learning support:

'Getting access to this support and information was a major hurdle and barrier.'

'They should come to you when you identify a disability on enrolment.'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- delays arranging learning support after enrolment created barriers for these learners
- some disabled learners didn't know about or weren't able to get accessible information about courses and available learning support.

Delayed learning support:

'It took a while to have an initial meeting (with support services) - we are still working through things.'

'It's very reactive - I only got support when my grades were plummeting - they came to me then.' (Disabled Learner with Dyslexia)

'I found it strange I had a writer at school, and when I mentioned it when I enrolled, I heard nothing.' (Disabled Learner with Dyslexia)

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- some disabled learners have to provide their own support
- there are delays with getting learning support arranged after enrolment for some disabled learners which impacts their learning, assessment, and achievement
- some disabled learners didn't feel listened to.

Lack of learning support or flexibility with assessments and exams:

'I get exhausted during exam time. If I am getting As and Bs in assessments, and Ds in exams, I am not the problem.'

The feedback from support staff and disabled learners shows:

- some disabled learners really struggle with exam conditions even when they have good grades from internal assessment. This indicates that their impairment-related needs are not being met with exams, there needs to be more flexibility with assessments and deadlines, and that exams are

not necessarily the best way to assess the knowledge of some disabled learners due to their anxiety

- Ako Aotearoa and [ACHIEVE www.achieve.org.nz](http://www.achieve.org.nz) have developed a resource for New Zealand conditions, as a guide for Alternative Arrangements in Tests and Examinations for disabled learners¹³ Using this resource for all Te Pūkenga providers to develop consistent policies would overcome many of the barriers identified by the disabled learners.

Lack of learning support because of no diagnosis or funding for assessment:

'No diagnosis - we can't do anything without an assessment which costs.'
'Process of getting officially diagnosed took a whole year (my first year of study) ...'

The feedback from support staff and disabled learners shows:

- there are disabled learners with learning support needs but with no diagnosis who are refused learning support until they have an assessment. This can have a significant impact on the achievement of these disabled learners in vocational education. This refusal may be at odds with the need to provide 'reasonable accommodations' under the Human Rights Act, particularly if a disabled learner has obvious impairment-related learning support needs
- often assessments are used to determine the best support required. Therefore, is it appropriate to ask disabled learners to medically validate their impairment if they have obvious learning support needs?
- the cost of assessment appears to be a significant barrier to the learning support and academic achievement of some disabled learners, in particular, those with specific learning disabilities like dyslexia or neuro diverse conditions such as autism
- many disabled learners can't afford to pay the estimated \$300-800 for an assessment because of their low incomes. Some tertiary providers fund assessments while others believe they don't have the funding for these assessments and try to pass on this cost to the student. Some disabled learners argue that if a tertiary provider requires an assessment or diagnosis, the organisation should fund this assessment.

One solution would be to negotiate national bulk assessment arrangements with some large providers to bring the cost down. Another option would be a

¹³ www.ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre

central fund that can be used when a disabled learner or provider can't afford an assessment.

Inconsistent Covid-19 response and the difficulties with online learning:

'It was frustrating to study online during the lockdown.'
'I need face to face learning, especially with my learning disability.'
'In Covid, the technology wasn't always compatible - MAC v PC.'

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- some students with specific learning disabilities and autism struggled with online learning during the pandemic lockdown and prefer face-to-face learning. This has meant some disabled learners have had to repeat papers, found online learning exhausting, and had difficulties with compatibility of technology.
- there can be difficulties with compatibility of online platforms and assistive technology if the needs of disabled learners are not considered in planning and design.

Other disabled learners struggle with online learning if their learning support needs and assistive technology are not considered when planning online platforms and learning. For example, students who are blind or vision impaired who use screen readers and other technology, those using voice options for reading material, sign language interpreters or captioning for Deaf students. Some disabled learners may not have access to a computer at home due to financial hardship or low computer literacy skills.

Disability Support staff overwhelmed by the increasing demand for their services:

The difficulties of having part-time or limited Disability Support (DSS) staff:

'So busy working directly with individuals I can't progress the service forward.'
'We are trying to make sure they come back and see the same person, but there are not enough staff to work with the learners.'
'(Disabled learners) don't get support needed during the term - it is very busy.'
'Small regional campus - we don't have a lot of people available to hire for support.'

The feedback from support staff shows:

- Disability support staff are concerned about the increasing demand for their services and how this is impacting on the service that they can provide disabled learners.
- They talk about not being able to progress the service forward, the lack of staff and the impact on consistency of service and follow up, and not being able to give the individual support they would like to give disabled learners during the term.
- Some tertiary providers have limited DSS staff and this impacts on the support and systems that they can provide, and in some smaller areas it is hard to hire support staff.

2.2 Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

More of a systemic approach (top down) to supporting disabled learners rather than just delegating this to Disability Support Services:

'Disability needs to be more recognised as an equity group. It needs more focus on the system and how we promote disability achievement. Need to increase the presence of disabled learners as important in equity.'

The feedback from support staff shows:

- DSS and other staff want disabled learners recognised as an equity group with system level change, promotion and monitoring of disabled learner outcomes. Senior level accountability is also needed for resolving issues that are impacting the successful participation and achievement of disabled learners in vocational education.

All staff taking responsibility for supporting disabled learners rather than this just being delegated to DSS staff:

'... if I can get someone else involved to support (disabled learners) to get the right level of support then that is better ... Some (academic departments) we are building a relationship with; some we need to do more work. The importance of having good relationships with academic departments and for them to seek advice early.'

The feedback support staff shows:

- To be successful DSS staff need to build good relationships with, and the 'disability confidence' of academic departments and be able to seek advice early.

Contacting disabled learners at enrolment:

'If (learning support) was built into enrolment that would be great ...'
(Disabled Learner with Dyslexia)

'Good, early planning helps provide quality support.'

This feedback from disabled learners and support staff, in this and earlier sections, shows:

- contact at enrolment to arrange learning support is essential and for many disabled learners. Delays with arranging support can have a negative impact on their learning, assessment, and achievement.

Providing the right impairment-related learning support:

'Knowing I have support gives me more confidence.'

'Reassuring me about the things I felt concerned, worried, and anxious about, and providing positive reassurance to believe in myself.'

(Tutor) 'She would typically give me a ring and talk through the course work. Getting hold of her is fantastic, she is willing to bend over backwards to help ...'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- when disabled learners receive the right learning support it makes a huge difference and is often better than what they received at school
- there are a range of supports that make a difference when tailored to the specific impairment-related needs of the disabled learner.

Focusing on what the disabled learner is good at can have huge benefits for them: -

Staff valuing the skills of disabled learners:

'I put my heart and soul into my assignments and received good marks. I now know I have good ideas and my voice and opinions are worth something.'

'The biggest thing I've taken away from studying is that I am not dumb and incapable after all.'

'People need to believe in me and see that I can do it.'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- the benefits for disabled learners of completing vocational education in terms of building their confidence, believing in their own ability, having their skills and ideas valued
- they are just asking to be given a chance!

<p>Opportunity 3</p>	<p>Some disabled learners being reluctant to associate with Disability Support Services or provide impairment information: Some disabled learners are scared to provide personal information about their impairment or seek help due to fear about how they will be treated if they do this. This can be due to past negative experiences when they did this at high school. This can lead to disabled learners having delayed or no support, which then impacts on their academic outcomes. Creating a safe learning environment for disabled learners is fundamental to their learning support needs being met and achieving their academic potential.</p>
	<p>How might Te Pūkenga staff create safe processes, environments and learning experiences so all disabled learners are comfortable to provide personal information about their impairment and seek help if required?</p>

3.1 Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Being scared to provide personal information about their impairment or seek help:

<p><i>'I feel like by ticking that box I would be 'cast aside' and people will automatically assume I can't achieve.'</i></p> <p><i>'The name reminded me of high school. Didn't want to be associated with disabilities. I've gotta get over that, don't I.'</i></p> <p><i>'Still, a lot of students don't seek support and miss out or access support later in their study - leads to delayed support.'</i></p>

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- there are disabled learners who are scared to provide personal information about their disability or seek help due to fear about how they will be treated if they do this
- stigma and bad treatment at school creates a barrier, negative attitudes if a student ticks that box and some with autism not associating with having a disability. Staff were concerned that this can lead to disabled learners having delayed or no support, which then impacts their academic outcomes.

Section 1.7 provides guidelines for creating a safe environment for personal information.

Fear of how they will be treated or what to expect:

'If I fail it's not because I am thick.'

'By the time I left school I felt like I was worthless, stupid, rejected, and my ideas, opinions and views about anything were not important.'

'Despite struggling from the beginning of school right through until the end nobody picked up on my obvious difficulties ... If this was picked up, support put into place, and accommodations made my life could have turned out very different.'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- the significant impact on disabled learners of not receiving impairment-related learning support, bullying, and having their skills under-valued at school.
- this leading to learners questioning their self-worth and their ability to do further study.
- disabled learners know that with the right support their life could be very different.

3.2 Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

Creating a safe environment to associate with disability support services or provide impairment information:

'Framing the language so it's not interpreted as a barrier into something positive.'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- some disabled learners are scared to provide personal information about their impairment or seek help due to fear about how they will be treated if they do this. This can lead to delayed or no support
- many of the current disabled learners said their fear was the result of how they were treated at secondary school. It is recommended that the Ministry of Education considers this feedback and develops solutions to resolve the issues raised in this report
- creating a safe learning environment for disabled learners is fundamental to their impairment-related learning support needs being met.

<p>Opportunity 4</p>	<p>Some disabled learners are feeling overwhelmed:</p> <p>Some disabled learners feel overwhelmed about their ability to do further study and some classroom activities, due to how they were treated at high school and with other life experiences. The number of students with mental health issues is also increasing in vocational educational</p> <p>Teaching staff would appreciate more assistance to support students with mental health conditions or with those who are overwhelmed and struggling. For these disabled learners having someone to talk to really helps. Inclusive classroom activities and peer support can also assist these disabled learners, as long as their teachers and peers are considerate of the person's impairment-related needs</p>
	<p><i>How might Te Pūkenga staff be enabled to support learners who feel overwhelmed or who have a mental health condition, so these disabled learners receive the right support to achieve their academic potential?</i></p>

4.1 Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Feeling overwhelmed:

'First days were me being very shy and anxious. Mum came with me. Now I have great friends.' (Disabled Learner with anxiety and autism)

'Having to stand-up and introduce yourself, told to get into groups with strangers, and do team building type exercises were all terrible experiences for me ... I was always the last to find a group and would not know how to interact with others, leading them to not try and interact with me or treating me differently because I am acting awkward ... It could take me days, sometimes weeks to recover, especially if I had a negative experience that left me feeling self-conscious, rejected or depressed.'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- that negative school and other life experiences can leave some disabled learners feeling overwhelmed about their ability to do further study and some classroom activities
- the need to look at ways of building peer support for disabled learners and how some classroom and group activities can impact learners with anxiety Teaching and support staff need to be aware of this
- with the right support some disabled learners can establish friends.

Lack of support from peers:

'There is a bully in our class and even though I brought it up with the tutor, nothing was done.'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- a number of disabled learners interviewed have experienced bullying by their peers
- some teaching staff could be more understanding about this and other issues.

4.2 Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

More support for students experiencing mental health issues:

'Increasing the amount done with students with mental health issues is something we are working on too ... important in getting those learners to stay ... what is getting in the way of your study ...'

'Mental health is a real issue and it's hard on a tutor to have to deal with it.'

The feedback from both disabled learners and support staff shows:

- The number of students with mental health issues is increasing.
- More support for teaching staff around supporting students with mental health is required.

Support when a disabled learner is struggling:

(After Getting Behind) 'I have now met with my tutor and made a plan for the rest of my study.'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- being able to talk with someone really helps when a disabled learner is struggling
- assistance with planning a way forward or resolving 'past trauma' was useful and it was important to them that staff 'don't give up on you'
- support staff such as tutor aides provide an important role in explaining questions, assisting with organisation, and completing tasks, reassurance, etc.

Peer Support:

'Another student inspired me... being accepted is a motivator.'

'I know everyone is here for study - but nice to have more lunchtime clubs to have a space from study to create a sense of belonging.'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- many disabled learners found peer support really helpful, with various tangible benefits - inspired, motivated, a sense of belonging and helping others, study support, friends.

Opportunity 5	<p>Financial hardship for some disabled learners and lack of funding for disability-related learning support:</p> <p>Some support staff and disabled learners are concerned that the current funding model for paying for learning support, particularly for those disabled learners with high support needs, is inadequate and this impacts on their ability to provide the right support for these learners.</p> <p>Many disabled learners also face financial hardship due to being on low incomes, benefits and having additional medical costs due to their impairments.</p> <p>Reviewing the current funding model so all tertiary providers have adequate funding to support in particular those disabled learners with high support needs and those who face financial hardship, would make a difference.</p>
	<p><i>How might the funding model remove financial barriers to disabled learners who face financial hardship and who have high supports needs?</i></p>

5.1 Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Poverty and financial hardship for some disabled learners:

Feedback from disabled learners shows:

- there is no accessible public transport for disabled people in some areas, and with many on low incomes, they struggle to cover petrol and taxi costs
- some disabled learners are parents who deal with the same issues as other parents. Financial hardship can be a real issue for them particularly if they have high medical or other impairment-related costs in addition to being a parent and student.

Lack of funding for disability-related learning support:

'Funding model doesn't work.'

'Signing interpreter is expensive - students worry about the cost.'

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- lack of funding for learning support can have an impact on some disabled learners getting the support they require

- some support staff have concerns about the funding model for paying for learning support for disabled learners, particularly those with high support needs
- students worry about the cost of supports such as interpreters and whether there is sufficient funding for these supports
- staff are also concerned that insufficient funding for learning support prolongs courses for some disabled learners and doesn't give them the 'freedom to learn.'

5.2 Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

More funding for learning support for disabled learners:

'(Wish) Funding for anything and everything to enable people. Students and staff.'

The feedback from support staff shows:

- we need to invest in disabled learners and value the contribution and skills they can bring to our community, rather than seeing them as a cost to society.

Support with course fees and other costs, and financial information to make informed decisions about studying:

'Being awarded a study award in my first year (for having a disability) was a huge help ...'

'They drop out because they can't feed themselves (or pay their medical bills).'

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- many disabled learners are on low incomes and initiatives such as free fees and study awards can make a real difference with whether they study or not
- while studying some struggle with poverty and balancing paying for medical bills and food
- these learners needed clear information about how much money they would earn to make an informed decision about whether they could afford to study or not.

Financial Allowances and withdrawal policies consider disabled learner needs:

'Withdrawal for mental health issues - if they haven't passed over half their courses, they won't be eligible for a student allowance if they choose to come back.'

The feedback from support staff shows:

- that staff believe disabled learners should not be disadvantaged financially if they have to study part-time, withdraw from courses or don't pass all their courses due to an impairment.

**Opportunity
6**

Lack of Employment Pathways for disabled learners:

Some of the disabled learners spoke about a range of barriers into employment. Often employer concerns hide the fact that some employers are not 'disability confident' and need more support. Unfortunately, these issues can have a negative impact on a disabled learner's confidence when it comes to considering employment.

Some disabled learners also lack academic and other pathways that lead to employment. Unfortunately, many disabled people leave high school without qualifications and the foundation skills to have successful vocational education pathways and options for this.

Being more intentional about assisting all disabled learners to gain qualifications and achieve their academic potential at high school would create more pathways and options for disabled learners into vocational education and onto employment. Because of lack of flexibility with assessments and exams not necessarily being the best way to assess the knowledge of some disabled learners, some disabled learners struggle to show their academic potential and to gain qualifications. This is a failure by the system and must be addressed.

The evidence in this report suggests that once disabled learners have their impairments identified and they receive the right impairment-related support many achieve their academic potential. This has the potential to improve their employment pathways.

Creating vocational education partnerships with disability employment agencies, internships programmes like Project SEARCH and the MSD Lead Toolkit could also assist with this.

How might Te Pūkenga disabled learners gain qualifications that enable them to have equitable access to vocational learning pathways and employment?

6.1 Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Lack of Academic Pathways leading to employment or further study:

'Having no qualification or worthwhile work experience meant even if I found a full-time job, I would be no better off being on the benefit and working part-time.'

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- some disabled learners lack academic and other pathways that lead to employment. With education outcomes far worse for disabled people when compared with other equity groups, many disabled people leave secondary school without qualifications and the foundation skills to have successful vocational education pathways and options that lead to employment
- some disabled learners, such as those with learning (intellectual) and other disabilities, face real barriers gaining qualifications This can be due to negative attitudes towards their disability and their ability, and the lack of impairment-related learning support strategies that would allow these students to show their academic potential and gain qualifications
- because of the lack of flexibility with assessments and exams not necessarily being the best way to assess the knowledge of some disabled learners, some struggle to achieve beyond Level 2 Unit Standards and show their academic potential, which limits their vocational education and employment options.

Lack of Employment Opportunities for disabled learners:

'The only 'career' and job options she gave me was a day-care worker, or a garbage man. These options destroyed my confidence and self-worth. This experience left me full of fear and feeling like I was completely screwed ...'
'(Work placement) employers need to be educated in what they're getting.'

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- some of the disabled learners faced a range of barriers to employment including fear about not getting workplace support, and negative attitudes from career advisors about their skills and abilities. The impact of these negative attitudes on their confidence and being able to generate enough income from part-time work to make learning worthwhile
- when creating employment opportunities and internships for disabled learners we need to educate employers about their learning and workplace support needs, otherwise these learners will struggle to show their potential
- the 'work readiness model' is often a barrier to employment for disabled people, when it is assumed that they are not 'work ready.' We need to ask, 'is anyone 'work ready' at the start of their career?' This focus on 'work readiness' may hide the fact that some employers are not

'disability confident' and need support, and why some employers use health and safety as an excuse to not employ disabled people.

6.2 Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

More Academic Pathways leading to employment or further study:

'Sometimes students can go on a different path and develop other skills. We try to find something the student is really really interested in and start from Level 4 - 5. The path will lead a student to employment, but by spending more time at L5 he may be able to come back later and complete higher study.'

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- being more intentional about assisting all disabled learners to gain qualifications and achieve their academic potential at secondary school and in vocational education would create more pathways and options for disabled learners into vocational education and onto employment
- resolving the barriers to disabled learners gaining qualifications and foundation skills is essential.

While managing Disability Support Services at Lincoln University, the author of this report saw many examples where disabled learners had not had their impairments identified or learning support needs met at secondary school. They therefore 'failed' to gain any qualifications at school.

Once their impairments were identified at tertiary level and they received the right learning support, most gained their qualifications and got jobs. Sadly, this failure at school was often due to the system and our approach in not meeting the needs of these disabled learners, rather than their ability. This is illustrated by the fact that most achieved qualifications at tertiary level once they received the right support.

More Employment Pathways:

'More work experience and more time would be good.'
'... My next diploma integrated work experience into the course which worked a lot better.' (Student with ADHD with family responsibility)

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- creating employment opportunities and internships for disabled learners is important
- integrating this into courses works for some of these students and may assist them to overcome their fears about work and workplace barriers, and create pathways into jobs
- disabled learners should receive information about pathways into vocational education and employment and should be seen as 'employable' like their non-disabled peers.

Vocational provider partnerships with Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Health funded employment agencies should be developed to create employment opportunities and internships like [Project SEARCH](#) for disabled learners integrated into courses.

These employment agencies already work with disabled people with various impairments and have employers who are 'disability confident.' They employ many disabled staff, so it doesn't make sense to duplicate these services. Instead, these partnerships should be developed to create work placements and internships integrated into courses and for employment opportunities.

Project SEARCH is a 12-month internship model developed in the United States for disabled people, with over 600 programmes worldwide. Targeted at disabled people with high support needs, over 12-months the interns complete a 3-week induction and then 3 x 10-week internships in a range of employment settings to learn work skills. Through the Trades Academy, this could potentially be used to develop 'apprenticeship' for disabled learners with learning (intellectual) and other disabilities, who have historically faced significant barriers to vocational education and employment.

The [MSD Lead Toolkit](#) is a valuable resource for leaders, managers, and human resource professionals to create an inclusive and welcoming employment environment for disabled people. This, plus other training, resources, and support from the employment agencies should be used to educate employers about the learning and workplace support needs of disabled learners and build their 'disability confidence.'

Opportunity 7	<p>Inaccessible Communication and Information:</p> <p>It is important tertiary providers consider the needs of disabled learners with different impairments when providing information and communication. The needs of disabled learners also need to be considered in the purchasing of digital platforms, software, and computers so that the online environment is also accessible to disabled learners, particularly those who use assistive technology.</p> <p>There are also some disabled learners who don't have the digital and computer literacy skills required for vocational education or access to devices, Wi-Fi, data, or a computer at home.</p>
	<p><i>How might all Te Pūkenga disabled learners gain digital and computer literacy skills and have access to information, communication and online technology that considers their needs?</i></p>

7.1 Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Lack of Information about courses, academic requirements, or available learning support for disabled learners in accessible formats:

'Last year's programme guide was confusing, so much to read, criteria, so much to submit.'

'One of the issues is the information for students - they don't know how the course will fit their needs.'

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff shows:

- some disabled learners struggle to read information provided by some tertiary providers at enrolment, in classroom settings, with study guides and assessment
- it is important tertiary providers consider the needs of disabled learners with different impairments.
- there also needs to be more support to assist staff and disabled learners to assess how a course will fit the needs of a disabled learner and whether they can achieve the academic and entry requirements, otherwise incorrect assumptions can be made.

Inaccessible digital platforms and computer technology

'We need more accessible technology.'

'It's a digital world out there – (Disabled Learners) need (digital) skills to be

This feedback from support staff shows:

- some disabled learners struggle with online access to information and online learning
- some tertiary providers' systems are not fit for disabled learners to use
- some disabled learners find technology used by their tertiary provider inaccessible, due to the needs of disabled learners not considered in the purchasing of digital platforms and computer technology
- some disabled learners struggle because they don't have computer literacy skills that are required in today's world.

The earlier information from Statistics NZ and feedback shows many disabled learners are struggling to achieve educational outcomes due to not receiving the right impairment-related learning support. If this continues there is a risk that some disabled learners will miss out on developing these digital and computer literacy skills.

Lack of access to computer devices, Wi-Fi and data can be a huge barrier for some disabled learners on low incomes:

The feedback from support staff shows:

- some disabled learners don't have access to devices, Wi-Fi, and data. We also know from earlier feedback that some also don't have access to a computer at home due to financial hardship or a lack of computer literacy skills.

7.2 Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

Access to information and communication that considers that there are disabled learners who require information and communication in alternative formats:

'...The emails need to be simplified for me.'

'I had no idea what I was doing. Got the forms, way better on paper than online.'

'... helpful if there was more writing down stuff so I could take my own notes.'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- that some disabled learners need information simplified, particularly those with learning (intellectual) disability, specific learning disabilities (SLD) such as dyslexia
- some online information is not accessible to some disabled learners. For example, it is important that information on websites is accessible to assistive technology such as screen readers and available in alternative formats such as Word and on paper
- support with explaining information, providing lecture notes, or recording lectures can be helpful for some disabled learners
- It is also important that when tertiary providers are purchasing digital platforms, software, and computers that they consult with disabled learners who use assistive technology in the planning stages to check that these systems are compatible and accessible to assistive technologies.

The Ministry of Social Development has developed the ['Accessibility Charter' programme](#). This provides advice, support, training, and resources to assist senior leaders and their staff to understand the standards for providing material in various alternate formats for disabled people. The aim is to improve information and communication access for disabled people.

This is supported by Disabled Persons Organisation (DPOs) who provide advice and support on alternative formats for people with learning disabilities, those that are blind, or vision impaired and the Deaf community.

Various public sector departments, district health boards and other organisations have signed up to this programme. This is one way that vocational providers could be supported with implementing an accessible information and communication environment for disabled learners.

Developing the computer literacy skills of all disabled learners:

'Computer Literacy: When they get the tools, they can excel.'

The feedback from support staff shows:

- some disabled learners don't have the digital and computer literacy skills required for vocational education or access to devices, Wi-Fi, data, or a computer at home. These barriers need to be resolved if disabled learners are to succeed in vocational education. We also need to ensure disabled learners receive the right impairment-related learning support to resolve the barriers that prevent them developing these digital and computer literacy skills.

Opportunity 8	Inaccessible physical environment for disabled learners: Some current disabled learners are struggling with the physical access environment at the campus they attend. This impacts on the time it takes for these disabled learners to move around these campuses.
	How might Te Pūkenga ensure all disabled learners can access a physical environment that considers their needs?

8.1 Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

'We have an entire block that's not physically accessible ... our doors are heavy ...'

'Access to facilities is difficult due to the lifts being full and it taking so much time to move around campus.'

The feedback from disabled learners shows:

- that elevators can be an issue for some disabled learners and not all parts of campuses are accessible - heavy doors, inaccessible buildings, and steep sites - which has an impact on the time for disabled learners to move around these campuses.

8.2 Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

'It's important they know physical barriers - many don't know when they enrol.'

The feedback from support staff shows:

- disabled learners visiting a campus prior to enrolment is important to determine any barriers to physical access and access routes.

It is essential that all tertiary providers comply with NZS 4121:2001: Design for Access and Mobility: Buildings and Associated Facilities. However, this is a minimum standard and may not provide the level of access required for some disabled learners in a tertiary environment.

All vocational providers should develop a 3 - 5-year Physical Access Plan and commit funds each year to a prioritised list of physical access provisions. This should be completed in partnership with disabled learners and disability support staff.

Completing regular physical access audits that cover the physical access requirements of disabled learners with different impairments and include buildings, landscaping, parking, and public transport, can save time and money. Contact CCS Disability Action for access to [Barrier Free Auditors](#).

Establishing a physical access reference of disabled learners with different impairments and disability support staff, to get user feedback about physical access requirements when completing audits and planning alterations or new buildings, are important considerations.

Planning and audits should take into account:

- all buildings, including student accommodation, marae, teaching, learning, administration, general and specialist support, spiritual and recreational facilities
- the level of compliance with the minimum requirement of NZS 4121:2001.
- A schedule of improvements to buildings that do not meet the required standards, which is implemented flexibly and based on emerging needs.

Physical access issues can also be overcome by:

- staff responsible for managing buildings, facilities and other parts of the physical environment attending training in physical access provisions for disabled people.
- each time a building design is altered, an assessment is made of how the building's accessibility can be improved (e.g. colour contrasts for those with vision impairments, carrying out acoustic audits).
- developing physical access standards and guidelines for campus physical access, leased, or rented buildings
- creating a 'Physical Access Kit' for staff and disabled learners
- those responsible for student timetables considering the 'access route' for those with mobility impairments and allowing enough time to travel between classes and moving teaching from inaccessible areas, prior to classes starting.

5 He Matapaki Anō | Further Discussion

The New Zealand Human Rights Act and Disabled Learners

Staff within vocational education should be provided with guidance and training on the use of non-discriminatory practices. These staff need to be aware of their legal obligations under the Human Rights Act, the Privacy Act, Health and Disability Commissioner Code of Rights and other legislation relevant to disabled learners.

Any organisation providing goods, services, public facilities, transport, employment, education, training, and accommodation must provide 'reasonable accommodations' for disabled people defined under the Human Rights Act.

In an education setting this covers all aspects of providing an inclusive education environment - design of buildings, facilities, events, IT systems, course design, content, and material, teaching and assessment practices, accessible information and communication processes, recruitment and enrolment procedures and learning support.

Disabled learners may complain to the Human Rights Commission if they feel that they have been discriminated against on the grounds of disability. Some have already done this.

Discrimination occurs when a disabled person is treated 'unfairly or less favourably' than a non-disabled person, and such treatment cannot be justified. For example, if a disabled learner is declined enrolment to a course on the grounds of disability, without assessing how they could complete the course with learning supports, or they are refused learning supports (reasonable accommodations) without justification, such practices could constitute discrimination.

Indirect discrimination occurs when a rule or practice exists which appears neutral, but in fact has a detrimental effect on a person. For example, placing enrolment information and forms on an inaccessible website for screen readers without alternative arrangements, such as Word documents.

Discrimination may also occur when someone fails to provide reasonable accommodations (learning support) in relation to a disabled learner and cannot show the failure is justified.

In a learning environment 'reasonable accommodations can include:

- assessing whether particular modifications or learning supports would allow a disabled learner to enrol in a course
- talking to the disabled learner, their whānau and support networks about what learning supports they require and how they would complete the parts of a course that a tutor may be concerned about
- modifying instructions, information, and communication processes to make them more accessible for assistive technology
- making adjustments to how teaching and assessment tasks are completed
- supplying additional training or learning support
- modifying building, facilities, and equipment
- providing a notetaker, reader/writer, sign language interpreter or other support staff to improve reading, information, and communication access
- regularly checking in with a disabled learner about their learning support needs.

Staff must be able to give a justification for not providing reasonable accommodations on the following grounds:

- (a) Unreasonable disruption
- (b) Undue hardship, or
- (c) A risk to health and safety.

This includes providing evidence that they have tried to find a solution to these issues with the disabled learner and their support networks.

According to the Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Ombudsman (2019):¹⁴

It is important that a service provider, employer, or education organisation bear in mind the need to provide 'reasonable accommodation' in all actions, services, and decisions.

Individual requests for reasonable accommodation must be considered constructively and careful thought given as to whether any modifications can be made to assist persons with disabilities to participate for example in a course of study.

¹⁴ Reasonable accommodation of persons with disabilities in New Zealand. The Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Ombudsman. 2019: https://www.hrc.co.nz/files/7814/4848/7923/imm_reasonable_accommodation_guide.pdf

Every reasonable effort should be made to accommodate persons with disabilities, and in circumstances where this is not practical, alternative options should be explored.

It is important to clearly communicate with the individual who has asked for 'reasonable accommodation' throughout your consideration of their request, and advise of any actions you will, or will not, be taking.

The presumption that a service provider, employer, or education organisation will provide necessary accommodations is balanced against 'reasonableness.' If there is a risk of harm to the individual or others, but measures can be taken to reduce the risk without unreasonable disruption, then the service provider, employer, or education organisation should take those measures.

If it is not reasonable to take the risk or the measures necessary to reduce the risk to a normal level are unreasonable, then a service provider, employer, or education organisation may be justified in discriminating.

While there may be an exception if a disabled learner cannot complete the core components of a course, staff must be able to justify such an exception and careful thought must be given as to how modifications can be made, including discussing possible solutions with the disabled learner and their support networks.

It is important that teaching staff are prepared to look at alternative ways a disabled learner could complete a task. There may be a disability-related solution for completing the component that teaching staff are not aware of.

If industry exams and entry requirements don't allow for the provision of reasonable accommodations (learning support) for disabled learners, providers may be at risk of a discrimination complaint.

It is important to remember students are being trained to take on a range of roles in an industry. For example, students enrolled in nursing training can take on professional roles in hospitals, GP practices, nursing education, case management, poison control centres and nursing administration. Training pathways must consider these wider roles in setting core components (also called inherent requirements).

Over a number of years, the largest category of Human Rights complaints has been on the grounds of disability.

There have already been tertiary education cases in New Zealand which were found in favour of the complainant, a disabled learner. This had significant financial consequences for the tertiary providers involved. Therefore, the risk of

complaints in terms of disability are real and should be taken seriously. The development and implementation of a Disability Action Plan can guard against this.

Privacy Act and Personal Information about a Disability or Impairment

The key to disabled learners providing personal information about their disability or impairment is creating a 'safe environment' for them to overcome their fear about how this information will be used, and how they will be treated if they provide this information.

The Privacy Commission has developed some Health Information Privacy Code Fact Sheets that help to create this 'safe environment.'

These provide guidelines around asking for health information and provide suggestions for collecting, storage, access and talking about health information of disabled people.

Health information should:

- be collected directly from the individual
- only be used for the purpose for which it was collected, and
- be provided for the purpose for asking for this health information with permission to share this information and to whom. The person providing this information should be aware of these requirements.

As a general rule, health information about a disabled learner should not be shared with another staff member until the disabled learner has given their permission. The only exception is when there is a threat to public health or the safety of the individual/s concerned, but staff need to justify their actions. ¹⁵

If disabled learners understand the purpose for asking for this information and how it will be used, they are far more likely to provide this information. Often this is not made clear in enrolment and other forms.

Building a Partnership with Disabled Learners

An essential element of the UN Convention, New Zealand Disability Strategy, and the Enabling Good Lives Principles (EGL) is the active involvement of

¹⁵ Sourced from the Privacy Commissioner's Website. (2021).

disabled people and their whānau in the development of services for them and building disabled leadership.

The EGL principles is the framework for the transformation of the disability support system and long-term direction the Government wants to implement.

It is now recognised that the current system is not achieving the outcomes in areas such as education and employment that need to be achieved.

The aim is to build a disability support system for disabled people based on the following Enabling Good Lives Principles (EGL):

1. **Self-determination:** Disabled people are in control of their lives.
2. **Beginning early:** Invest early in families/whānau to support them to be aspirational and to support disabled children to become independent.
3. **Person-centred:** Disabled people have supports that are tailored to their individual needs/goals, and that take a whole life approach.
4. **Ordinary life outcomes:** Disabled people are supported to live an everyday life in everyday places.
5. **Mainstream first:** Disabled people are supported to access mainstream services.
6. **Mana enhancing:** The abilities and contributions of disabled people, their families and whānau are recognised and respected.
7. **Easy to use:** Disabled people have supports that are simple to use and flexible.
8. **Relationship building:** Supports build and strengthen relationships between disabled people, their whānau and community.

Overall, the aim of these principles is that disabled people have the same opportunities for learning, employment, having a home, family, and social participation, like non-disabled people at a similar stage of life.

Therefore, the review of the vocational education system needs to consider how to implement these principles and this direction.

One way is by ensuring disabled learners with different impairments are active partners in the development and review of design of buildings, course content, teaching practices, information and communication processes and learning support, etc. Disabled learners may also experience additional barriers arising from membership of other equity groups.

Valuing their feedback will save tertiary providers time and money and will provide them with valuable insights that they may not have considered in their design and planning. Disabled learners should be a key partner in this process.

If a tertiary provider is developing a Disability Action Plan, they should have disabled learners with different impairments on reference group/s overseeing the development of these plans and other groups discussing wider equity and diversity issues.

Disabled people make up at least 24 percent of our population so they are the largest equity group in New Zealand and their views should be seen as important.

Some tertiary providers already have mandated representative disabled student associations or groups that provide regular feedback and forums with disabled learners. Tertiary providers that don't already have mandated representative disabled student groups should be encouraged to establish these, rather than just consulting with individual disabled learners.

Regular engagement surveys with disabled learners are also essential to identify and resolve barriers to their participation and achievement. This will ensure tertiary providers are getting feedback from the wider student body, as well as mandated representative groups.

Building a disabled student voice is seen as a priority and a National Disabled Students Association (NDSA) has been established to advocate on behalf of disabled learners.

6 Kōrero Whakamutunga | Conclusion

A fully inclusive vocational education system recognises, and values disabled learners by:

1. Staff at all levels taking responsibility for providing learning support for disabled learners.
2. Creating a system wide approach to supporting disabled learners.

This includes:

Inclusive policies, procedures and practices, endorsed by the senior leadership at governance and management levels that remove the barriers highlighted in this report. The feedback shows disabled learners are 'disabled' by their environment.

Building the infrastructure that enables all staff to become 'disability confident' and makes it easy for teaching and other staff to support disabled learners. For example, institution-wide policies and procedures for providing accessible lecture notes, supporting teaching staff with copying, enlarging, and transcribing information, arranging tests, exams, and other assessments, and those with more complex needs.

Providing the resources for disability support staff to support teaching and other staff to implement these inclusive practices. This will enable DSS staff to better support disabled learners with more complex needs. Support of disabled learners should not be the sole responsibility of these DSS staff.

Building a partnership with disabled learners with different impairments in planning and design through mandated representative disabled student associations and groups.

Developing system wide training and resources to build the 'disability confidence of all staff involved with supporting disabled learners. This should cover how to provide accessible information, communication and learning support for disabled learners with different impairments. Invite disabled learners to co-design these training programmes and resources focusing on inclusive practices.

Providing guidance and training on the use of non-discriminatory practices, so that all staff involved with supporting disabled learners are aware of their legal obligations under the Human Rights and Privacy Act, HDC Code of Rights and other relevant legislation.

Using the [Principles of Universal Design in Education](#) in all course design, curriculum, delivery, assessment, learning support strategies, information and communication processes, the design of buildings and access routes. Fundamentally this requires flexible learning support (reasonable accommodations) with all teaching, classes, workplace learning, field trips, tests, exams, and other assessments. This must consider disabled learners with different impairments and allow them to achieve their academic potential.

Reviewing and analysing the outcomes and satisfaction of disabled learners in an ongoing review, reflect, response cycle, at both national and local levels.

Planning ahead - this assumes the numbers of disabled learners will continue to increase, so all planning should consider the learning support needs of disabled learners with different impairments, rather than waiting for them to arrive.

7 Ngā Taunaki | Recommendations:

To achieve this:

Developing and Implementing Disability Action Plans

1. All Workforce Development Councils and their Senior Leadership Teams are required to develop a Disability Action Plan for their part of the vocational education system. These will need to identify and resolve the identified barriers facing disabled learners and include strategies for developing the policies, procedures, practices, infrastructure, and allocation of resources to resolve identified barriers for disabled learners.
2. All providers in the vocational education system are required to develop a Disability Action Plan, using the Kia Ōrite toolkit being developed by the Tertiary Education Commission.

This toolkit will enable providers to review their support of disabled learners in partnership with disabled learners, and assist leaders, managers, teaching and other staff to take more responsibility for the support of disabled learners.

It will also assist them to create a framework that enables all staff to become 'disability confident' by developing the infrastructure to ensure they can confidently and effectively support disabled learners.

This will also need to consider how to support employers providing workplace training and placements with implementing learning supports for disabled learners and building their 'disability confidence.' Training and support for workplace assessors and other staff supporting employers with disabled learners will also be required.

3. Disability Support staff are seen as a resource to support the implementation of the Kia Ōrite Toolkit and Disability Action Plans.

Their role should also be to support teaching and other staff with creating an inclusive environment for disabled learners while not taking responsibility for it all. This will enable them to support those disabled learners with more complex needs.

It will also enable the vocational education system to better manage the learning support of an increasing number of disabled learners.

Building the Infrastructure for Supporting Disabled Learners

1. The leadership of Te Pūkenga considers how it will develop a consistent infrastructure across the vocational education system for supporting disabled learners.

This should enable all staff to become 'disability confident' and makes it easy for teaching and other staff to provide effective learning support for disabled learners with different impairments.

The feedback shows that when disabled learners receive the right learning support it makes a significant difference.

For example, developing system-wide:

- inclusive policies, procedures, and practices for learning support of disabled learners.
- Training and resources to build the 'disability confidence of all staff involved with supporting disabled learners.
- Guidance and training on the use of non-discriminatory practices.
- Strategies for implementing the Principles of Universal Design in Education in all course design, curriculum, delivery, and assessment.
- Consistent staff guidelines for supporting different disabled learners with tests, exams, and other forms of assessments. These should be based on the 'Guidelines and Procedures for the Provision of Alternative Arrangements in Tests and Examinations to Students with Disability/Impairment (Achieve, 2016). This should consider students with different impairments.
- Support systems to assist teaching and other staff to support the increasing number of students with mental health issues.
- Systems to monitor the outcomes and satisfaction of disabled learners across the vocational education system.
- Systems to review how to respond to the increasing number of disabled learners and the staffing and other resources required to meet this demand.
- Independent advocacy for disabled learners who don't feel their needs are being met or feel they are being bullied.
- Peer support systems for disabled learners to make classroom activities easier.
- Vocational provider partnerships with Ministry of Social Development and Ministry of Health funded employment agencies to create employment opportunities and internships like [Project SEARCH](#) for disabled learners integrated into courses.

- The [MSD Lead Toolkit](#), plus, other training, resources, and support from the employment agencies, should be used to educate employers about the learning and workplace support needs of disabled learners and build their 'disability confidence.'
2. At enrolment, all providers in the vocational education system are required to ask questions that identify those disabled learners who require learning support. There are some providers who are not currently doing this and the delay in the identification of these learning supports can have a significant impact on the academic achievement of these disabled learners.
 3. At the same time, the guidelines for creating a safe environment for disabled learners to provide personal information about their impairment are implemented consistently.

This should include developing a consistent set of questions at enrolment that all providers must use. This will help to ensure that there is better information about disabled learners across the vocational system. Many disabled learners fear how they will be treated if they provide this personal information, so this information needs to be reassuring.

4. Review whether disabled learners should require a diagnosis if they have obvious learning support needs. Is it appropriate to refuse support or ask disabled learners to medically validate their impairment if they have obvious learning support needs?
5. Develop nationally consistent policies, procedures, and guidelines for teaching and other staff for supporting disabled learners with online learning.

The feedback indicates some disabled learners struggle with online learning if their learning support needs and assistive technology are not taken into consideration in the planning stages of online platforms and learning. Some disabled learners don't have access to computers at home or find online learning hard because of their impairments.

Partnership with Representative Disabled Student Associations and Groups

1. As part of the development and implementation of Disability Actions Plans, all providers in the vocational education system are required to establish and work in partnership with representative disabled student associations and groups.

The Kia Ōrite Toolkit should be used to create these Disability Actions Plans and disabled learners with different impairments should be active partners in the review of the associated management and learning support systems, using this toolkit.

Valuing their feedback will save providers time and money and will provide them with valuable insights that they may not have considered in their design and planning.

Funding for Support of Disabled Learners

1. Review the funding model for paying for learning support, particularly for those who require high investment. This should also consider whether there is sufficient funding to support the increasing number of disabled learners. Feedback from both disabled learners and staff suggests this is not currently sufficient.
2. Negotiate national bulk assessment arrangements for those disabled learners who require an assessment or diagnosis. Given that most disabled learners are on low incomes and tertiary providers require an assessment or diagnosis, develop nationally consistent policy and procedures to fund these assessments either nationally or through providers.
3. Develop policies and procedures so disabled learners are not disadvantaged financially if they have to study part-time, withdraw from courses or don't pass all their courses due to an impairment.

Research on the Learning Supports of Disabled Learners with Different Impairments

1. There is a lack of New Zealand statistics or research about disabled learners with different impairments, the barriers they face, and effective learning supports for these different impairment groups.

Completing further research and developing consistent systems across the vocational education system for reporting information about current disabled learners from different impairment groups is recommended.

Improving Information, Communication and Physical Access

1. As part of their Disability Action Plan providers are required to implement the Ministry of Social Development 'Accessibility Charter' programme. This provides advice, support, training, and resources to assist staff to understand and improve information and communication access for disabled people.
2. Some disabled learners don't have the digital and computer literacy skills required to succeed in vocational education or access to devices, Wi-Fi, data, or a computer at home. It is therefore recommended that strategies are implemented to resolve these barriers to vocational education for these disabled learners.
3. All vocational providers are required to develop a 3 - 5-year Physical Access Plan, complete regular physical access audits and commit funds each year to improve physical access, in partnership with disabled learners and disability support staff.

Improving Learning Support for Disabled Learners in High Schools

1. A number of significant issues were raised by disabled learners about the lack of learning support and the way some were treated in secondary school.

Given that disabled learners are now a priority group and schools lay the foundation for vocational education, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education considers this feedback and develops solutions to resolve the issues raised in this report.

This should include improving the academic achievement of disabled learners at school. One remedy would be to require all high schools to develop a Disability Action Plan using the Kia Ōrite Toolkit.

8 Te tīma rangahau | Project Research Team

Te Pūkenga Research Team:

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A special thanks to the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) Ōritetanga Learner Success Directorate for their collaboration and assistance with research and analysis.

Appendix A: Ngā Ākonga whaikahaa me ngā kaihāpai | Focus group sessions - Disabled learners and staff who support them

This section contains an expanded list of statements (quotations) from disabled learners and the staff who support them in vocational education.

<p>Opportunity 1</p>	<p>Lack of disability awareness from teaching and other staff: When there is a lack of 'disability confidence' among staff, the educational barriers that disabled learners face are not understood, learners are often not provided with the right impairment-related learning support and their skills can be undervalued. Under the Human Right Act, if a tertiary provider declines enrolment to a course on the grounds of disability or fails to provide 'reasonable accommodations' in a teaching environment without justification, this could constitute discrimination.</p> <p>When staff are 'disability confident'; they are more willing to provide inclusive practices, be flexible and to offer the right impairment-related learning support, so disabled learners can achieve their academic potential.</p>
	<p>How might Te Pūkenga staff become more 'disability confident' to provide impairment-related learning support for disabled learners?</p>

Statements

Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'One day I couldn't see because I had forgotten my glasses. The tutor was unkind about that.'
- 'The tutor said I should do things myself, but if I had been able to get help with the keyboard (for disability) that would have been better.'
- 'School told me I was too dumb to study because I am dyslexic'
- 'Our tertiary provider hires subject matter experts - they are not necessarily good teachers. They don't understand students with different needs.'
- '... they should do better for learners with special needs.'
- 'I got told "If you need a reader/writer during exams you won't make it in industry.' (Disabled learner with Dyslexia)
- 'My big one has always been time. I'm really fatigued from staying up all night on assignments and I get sick from that. I've told tutors but they don't give you an extension or care how it gets done. They just care that you do it.'
- 'I had a lot of professional class support. When I came here the support and teacher's understanding was lacking. It's only after a year that they've only just started to try and help out.'
- 'I utilise disability services more than other services. Maybe the 3rd time I went into the other services someone asked if there was something wrong with me.'
- 'Entry into the course made some assumptions about me.'
- 'There needs to be more training around mental health in nursing ...'
- 'At other ITPs they do more for mental health training.'

The feedback from support staff:

- 'Have some staff who say - I don't want those students in my course.'
- Staff say, 'I can't have this person - this is a health and safety issue, or you can't have disabled learners in this course.'

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

Staff understanding the educational barriers disabled learners face

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'People need to understand my learning path.'
- 'Lots of operations have sometimes interrupted my study and made me feel left behind.'
- 'Once I was up and running there hasn't been any issues - there have been physical issues that have increased time taken to complete things ... For me access is the biggest problem, it is neither easy or convenient for me to get up and dressed and be ready in the mornings and then a 45 min trip into (lectures) ... Home based learning in my own time frame is brilliant.'
- 'Downside is missing the bouncing of ideas with people and a tutor. But accessibility outweighs this ... Many places claim to be wheelchair friendly, but they don't.' (Disabled Learner using a wheelchair).'
- 'Chill spaces - when someone is anxious, and they have to leave class and chill for a bit ... Quiet time in the cafe - an hour a day when the lights are dim and it's quiet (would be great for me)' (Student with Anxiety and Autism)
- 'Challenges include waking up in the morning. I typically sleep 12 hours. It is still hard. I've already missed my first deadline and the next. My time needs to be spread out more.' (Disabled learner with anxiety and autism)
- 'More free kai, better affordable canteen and free car parking would be helpful.'

Support from lecturers - inclusive teaching practice, learning support and assessment

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'Professional Development for lecturers should be on supporting us better ... they should do better for (disabled learners).'
- 'I wanted to get to know the diverse range of tutors and know their way of teaching... '
- 'I had an opportunity to meet tutors 3 weeks ahead of starting.' 'Marking guides are helpful - you know what is expected of you.'

The feedback from support staff:

- 'We have some staff who are keen and able. We have some staff who don't know what they ought to be doing - we are trying to get support in place for them.'
- 'It should be compulsory for all staff to get disability awareness and mental health and suicide training.'
- '(Wish) Support for staff. Education on disability. Professional Development on mental health one on one and suicide prevention.'
- 'Educating staff in using relay or an interpreter will help ... Imagine us all learning sign language.'
- 'It is good she brings a support person who talks with me to think in detail about what considerations that might apply due to the disability.'

Staff seeing the benefits of vocational training for disabled learners

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'Even if you don't get work you've improved by doing the right kind of learning.'
- 'Heaps more confidence, identified strengths. Know what it is like to be away from family ... went boating, found out what it was like and what to do. Like experiences, not just talking about it.'
- 'I dropped out of school and was sad for a year, and now I am confident and can leave the house ... I would feel confident to advocate for myself now.'
- '(Student with anxiety and autism)
- 'Success for me would be having the time, freedom, and financially situation to relax without worrying about where my next meal is coming from and having a roof over my head.'

Opportunity 2	<p>Issues impacting on disabled learners receiving the right learning support:</p> <p>Current disabled learners and their support staff indicate that there are various barriers impacting on disabled learners receiving the right impairment-related learning support.</p> <p>When disabled learners don't receive the right impairment-related learning support, this has a significant impact on their ability to achieve their academic potential.</p> <p>When disabled learners receive the right learning support this makes a huge difference and allows them to achieve their academic potential.</p>
	<p><i>How might Te Pūkenga disabled learners receive the right impairment-related learning support to achieve their academic potential and that resolve the barriers to learning that they face?</i></p>

Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Lack of learning support

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'More learning advisors and space for support. We have to book weeks ahead for support. More hands on.'
- 'We need more learning advisors. I don't go anymore because you have to book ahead two weeks and you don't know if you will need them.' (Student with ADHD)
- 'Our disability advisor last year was great... but this year we have had a new one ... not so good. I had an anxiety attack talking with her.'
- 'I didn't get to say my side of the story with the disability coordinator.' 'College gave me teacher aides, and I don't get that here.'
- 'There should be more support for people with disabilities in mainstream courses.'
- 'I wanted to do Agriculture. I couldn't do it because of my leg (disability).'
- ''My hands don't work either; all my typing is done with one thumb knuckle. The splint that held my finger out broke a few years ago and I haven't gotten around to getting a new one ... I spend a lot of time repairing my typing mistakes every few mins ... I know there are a lot of speech recognition tools ... but you spend so much time correcting the mistakes ... Using my thumb knuckle is fine for my needs now but if I was doing more intense work, I'd try speech recognition. It's just not worth it right now to try
- ... I can't use a mouse and keyboard at the same time. It wasn't a problem itself, but it made it take a lot more time than another person would ... Sometimes it takes 2-5 times more than an able person but there aren't time allowances.' (Disabled learner using a wheelchair)

The feedback from support staff:

- 'The ability to get student support in place early is very important.'
- '1/3 of learners don't check the paperwork to get disability support they need.'
- 'If I don't trust my interpreter I will withdraw.'
- 'For enrolments they tick box and don't see anyone here for support.'

Lack of Information about courses, academic requirements, or available learning support

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'Getting access to this support and information was a major hurdle and barrier.'
- 'They should come to you when you identify a disability on enrolment.' 'I didn't know what tutors were going to be like.'
- 'I didn't even know this course existed.'

- 'I had no idea where that door went (to the course rooms).'
- 'I would have (come here) sooner, but I didn't know what I wanted to do - I didn't even know this place existed.' (Disabled learner with ADHD/Asperger's)
- 'More knowledge/advertising about this course (needed). I didn't find out about it until I came looking for retail training.'

Delayed learning support

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'I had to provide my own support workers because no one reached out to me at first.'
- 'No one seems to take my disability into account, to help me enough.' 'It took a while to have an initial meeting (with support services) - we are still working through things.'
- 'It's very reactive - I only got support when my grades were plummeting - they came to me then.' (Disabled Learner with Dyslexia)
- 'I found it strange I had a writer at school, and when I mentioned it when I enrolled, I heard nothing.' (Disabled Learner with Dyslexia)
- 'Knowing the services out there - I didn't know when I started. It was hard to try and find the disability centre ...'
- '(Contact with Staff) It has caused problems over the years as they have proved very difficult to get hold of.' (Disabled learner using a wheelchair).

Lack of learning support or flexibility with assessments and exams

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'I get exhausted during exam time. If I am getting A's and B's in assessments, and D's in exams, I am not the problem.'
- 'Assessments are not fit for purpose.'
- 'I have 4 exams coming up. All worth 40 - 50%. I can do really well all year then crash and burn in a week.'
- 'This year has been tough; I've been experiencing anxiety and depression
- My whole school career was hard, I got bullied and formed an eating disorder, had family drama continuing to this day ... I would do well at internals but in exams crash and burn ... (MY challenge) is on prioritising work and time. I tend to overwork and burn myself out all the time ... I'm struggling with some of my assignments. There are a lot of deadlines. I'm trying to catch up ... Sometimes my anxiety will skyrocket, and my motivation will drop ... It takes me longer to understand because of my disability I have a good relationship with the staff here ... Process
- (support) for all disabilities needs to be available ... I want all support under one provider - the polytech, not an external provider.'

Lack of learning support because of no diagnosis or funding for assessment

The feedback from support staff and disabled learners:

- 'You might have been told you have a learning disability at school but no diagnosis.'
- 'No diagnosis - we can't do anything without an assessment which costs.' 'No diagnosis - we can't give resources, only the free stuff.'
- 'The process of getting officially diagnosed took a whole year (my first year of study). When I finally got the results, I was in denial (I still am trying to process what this means for me)'

Inconsistent Covid-19 response and the difficulties with online learning

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'COVID-19. What's happened at all polytechnics has been different. Unfair.' 'Covid -19 lockdown was difficult because I couldn't study because of (disability) so I stayed home.'
- 'It was frustrating to study online during the lockdown.'
- 'I need face to face learning, especially with my learning disability.' 'In Covid, sitting for an

- hour was exhausting.'
- 'I have had a mixture of a year, I have a learning disability, after Covid it was disjointed, we had to start all over again.'
- 'Because of Covid I will have to come back next year to finish up part time.'
- 'After Covid in one class we have hardly had a tutor at all ... I have just failed that class, I wanted to pull out but was told no.'
- 'Lots of learners are mothers, young kids can make it difficult to zoom.'
- 'During Covid I had no motivation to work from home.'
- 'In Covid the technology wasn't always compatible - MAC v PC.'

The feedback from support staff:

- 'During Covid many (disabled) learners did not know what was going on.' 'The course that is being completed was Xero and other programmes are incompatible with Apple and this made it hard (for disabled learners) to learn during lockdown.'

Disability Support staff overwhelmed by the increasing demand for their services

The feedback from support staff:

- 'So busy working directly with individuals I can't progress the service forward.'
- 'We are trying to make sure they come back and see the same person, but there are not enough staff to work with the learners.'
- 'Need to be able to do more work and follow up. We can't do it because we are meeting with those who are just coming to us late.'
- 'From a disability perspective, learners don't get support needed during the term - it is very busy.'
- 'Lack of staff at the coal face - we connect and keep giving to learners.'

The difficulties of having part-time or limited Disability Support (DSS) staff

The feedback from support staff:

- 'In the disability team we have an advisor at 0.5 and it is very hard to work with our disabled learners as a group or whole.'
- 'Small regional campus - we don't have a lot of people available to hire for support.'
- 'Those identified with disability - it's not easily picked up. We can't run a report to find out.'

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

More of a systemic approach (top down) to supporting disabled learners rather than just delegating this to disability support services

The feedback from support staff:

- 'I don't want to be meeting just with individuals - it needs to be at a system level.'
- 'Disability needs to be more recognised as an equity group. It needs more focus on the system and how we promote disability achievement. Need to increase the presence of disabled learners as important in equity.'
- 'Solving physical access issues shouldn't be a staff or student responsibility.'
- 'Senior leader - 'we can't fix the broken and (he) cut foundation funding.'

All staff taking responsibility for supporting disabled learners rather than this just being delegated to DSS staff

The feedback from support staff:

- 'From a disability perspective, working well across teams enables learners. Particularly with student support, it's the cross team working and liaison that supports and enables learners. This helps the student, if I can get someone else involved to support them to get the right level of support then that is better. That also goes to academic departments. Some we are building a relationship with; some we need to do more work. The importance of having good

- relationships with academic departments and for them to seek advice early.'
- 'Knowing the environment and I can find what I need is important.'
- 'We need more diverse support to meet the needs and rights of all disabled students.'
- 'When we bring a student down to support services they will be looked after.'

Contacting disabled learners at enrolment

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'If (learning support) was built into enrolment that would be great. If there was more discussion around needs and start of an action plan.' (Disabled Learner with Dyslexia)

The feedback from support staff:

- 'Good, early planning helps provide quality support.'
- 'What works is when we allow the student to decide with sufficient support, knowledge and information at enrolment.'
- 'Helping all students with basic needs has become a priority.'
- 'We've had several deaf students and we've had interpreters and the programme was successful. There are good outcomes.'
- 'Everybody's different. Support needs to be wraparound involving the staff, other students, family.'
- 'If we could make the support easier to access and convince students to come earlier it would work better.'
- 'At the beginning the information is given but there is so much at the start of the year it is hard for them to take it in.'

Providing the right impairment-related learning support

The feedback from disabled learners:

Benefits:

- 'Knowing I have support gives me more confidence.'
- 'In high school I could only do minimal work because there was minimal help because they thought I could do it. But I needed help. Here I get much more support when I need it ... When I was at high school, I needed help a lot but when I came here, I was much better. It makes me feel good.'
- 'Great and wonderful to have help. I didn't get it at school as I wasn't considered able (to do the work), and I didn't feel able. Now I do feel able.' (Disabled learner with anxiety and autism)
- 'It might give me confidence to go to mainstream (study).'
- 'Any type of disability stigma is a barrier. But I like to know (support) is there and available ... No bullying here, it's nice.'

Supports that make a difference:

- '...4-year-old daughter, hard to fit everything in ... helpful with recorded Zooms.'
- 'Learn by doing ...' (Disabled learner with ADHD/Asperger's) 'Feel all round supported. Having a reader/writer has helped.' Day 1 ... gave me an orientation of the library and the lecturers. 'Having an extra study period in the day is useful.'
- (Tutor) 'She would typically give me a ring and talk through the course work. Getting hold of her is fantastic, she is willing to bend over backwards to help ... Part of the course was to present a hand drawn project and for me I cannot hold a pencil ... I needed to get a medical cert and get someone to draw under my direction. Once it was confirmed there was no problem at all. (Disabled learner using a wheelchair).
- 'The only thing that 'helped' was support from others ... filling out forms/paperwork.'
- 'Reassuring me about the things I felt concerned, worried, and anxious about, and providing positive reassurance to believe in myself.'
- '... access to clear information I could access, read at my own pace and understand.'
- 'Being reassured that I would be financially secure was the main factor in finally committing to study.'
- 'Patience is big for me. If I don't get it straight away, I need people to be patient so I can get

- it.'
- 'The kindergarten ran a small study group on Friday's (just a few students) with a study tutor that helped breakdown assignments and talk about anything. I am a visual learner and need time to process information.'

Focusing on what the disabled learner is good at can have huge benefits for them

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'I put my heart and soul into my assignments and received good marks. I now know I have good ideas and my voice and opinions are worth something.'
- 'The biggest thing I've taken away from studying is that I am not dumb and incapable after all.'
- 'Look at what you are good at and try to strengthen that.'
- 'Even if a person has a disability, give them a chance. You never know if you only give them a chance.'
- 'At kindy (work experience placement) they don't see me as a person with a disability, they see me as a kind-hearted person.'

Staff valuing the skills of disabled learners

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'People need to believe in me and see that I can do it.'
- 'We gave the student the benefit of learning at his own pace. He has gained so much even if we didn't get the completion.'

Opportunity 3	<p>Some disabled learners being reluctant to associate with disability support services or provide impairment information: Some disabled learners are scared to provide personal information about their impairment or seek help due to fear about how they will be treated if they do this. This can be due to past negative experiences when they did this at high school. This can lead to disabled learners having delayed or no support, which then impacts on their academic outcomes. Creating a safe learning environment for disabled learners is fundamental to their learning support needs being met and achieving their academic potential.</p>
	<p>How might Te Pūkenga staff create safe processes, environments and learning experiences so all disabled learners are comfortable to provide personal information about their impairment and seek help if required?</p>

Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Being scared to provide personal information about their impairment or seek help

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'I feel like by ticking that box I would be 'cast aside' and people will automatically assume I can't achieve'
- 'The name reminded me of high school. Didn't want to be associated with disabilities. I've gotta get over that, don't I.'
- 'Using disability. Accepting that I needed help. Took me 6 months.'
- 'Not wanting to disclose wasn't to do with privacy or embarrassment. I wanted to do something without people giving special allowances for the fact I'm in a wheelchair.'
- 'Many autistic people however (including myself) reject this 'label' as it is deceiving ... Autism is spectrum, and every autistic person is unique and different to each other ... Autism is widely misunderstood and misrepresented by society including in the education, health, and government sectors ...'.

The feedback from support staff:

- 'Some students are 'disability proud' and others have had a bad history in previous schooling that can be a barrier to declaring.'
- 'Sometimes we aren't aware of a disability'.
- 'Some (disabled learners) are stigmatised ...;
- 'Still, a lot of students don't seek support and miss out or access support later in their study – leads to delayed support.'
- (Identifying disability) Ticking that box is a barrier. But they have to tick it to get the support
- 'Though you have that option, having a disability can be interpreted as a negative.'
- (Accessing Disability Support) 'They're intimidated.'
- 'If they identify later there can be a delay in getting support to them.' 'Particularly people on the ASD spectrum don't think it is disability so don't tick box.'
- 'We find that learners are too shy to ask for help.'

Fear of how they will be treated or what to expect

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'A little nervous about what to expect.'
- 'We are scared about our future and being told how to learn.' (Disabled learner with Dyslexia)

- 'If I fail it's not because I am thick.'
- 'Before this course I considered a mainstream course, but it was too scary. Probably wouldn't get much help and no connection with others.'

How current disabled learners feel about their previous experiences at school

- 'For me, the biggest barrier I faced is connected to my primary school, intermediate and college years. I struggled all the way through school. I struggled to fit-in with peers, was bullied right throughout my school years, had teachers who didn't engage with me, and I was constantly compared to others and reminded of how I wasn't meeting certain standards and expectations.'
- 'By the time I left school I felt like I was worthless, stupid, rejected, and my ideas, opinions and views about anything were not important.'
- 'I left school early with no qualifications, I could no longer cope with the stress of turning up to class. I was questioning my self-worth and started entertaining suicidal thoughts.'
- 'Despite struggling from the beginning of school right through until the end nobody picked up on my obvious difficulties ... If this was picked up, support put into place, and accommodations made my life could have turned out very different.'
- 'All my strengths and things I was good at were ignored. Having now studied early childhood education I understand just how much these early experiences affected and shaped my life.'

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

Creating a safe environment to associate with disability support services or provide impairment information

The feedback from support staff:

- 'Removing any stigma about ticking a box because they feel at a disadvantage.'
- 'Unless they tick the box, they don't get help.'
- 'Framing the language so it's not interpreted as a barrier into something positive.'
- (Accessing Disability Support) 'Need to build trust to counter anxiety to use support.'

Opportunity 4	<p>Some disabled learners are feeling overwhelmed:</p> <p>Some disabled learners feel overwhelmed about their ability to do further study and some classroom activities, due to how they were treated at high school and with other life experiences. The number of students with mental health issues is also increasing in vocational educational</p> <p>Teaching staff would appreciate more assistance to support students with mental health conditions or with those who are overwhelmed and struggling. For these disabled learners having someone to talk to really helps. Inclusive classroom activities and peer support can also assist these disabled learners, as long as their teachers and peers are considerate of the person's impairment-related needs.</p>
	<p><i>How might Te Pūkenga staff be enabled to support learners who feel overwhelmed or who have a mental health condition, so these disabled learners receive the right support to achieve their academic potential?</i></p>

Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Feeling overwhelmed

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'First days were me being very shy and anxious. Mum came with me. Now I have great friends.' (Disabled Learner with anxiety and autism)
- 'As part of studying I had to attend 'Workshops.' I found these hugely stressful. Often, I had to go out of town and sleep somewhere away from home which is hugely stressful and unsettling for me. Routine is vital for my coping skills ...The workshops are unpredictable, not knowing what I'm getting myself into was hugely stressful.'
- 'Having to stand-up and introduce yourself, told to get into groups with strangers, and do team building type exercises were all terrible experiences for me ... I was always the last to find a group and would not know how to interact with others, leading them to not try and interact with me or treating me differently because I am acting awkward ... It could take me days, sometimes weeks to recover, especially if I had a negative experience that left me feeling self-conscious, rejected or depressed.'
- 'I don't want to burst into tears because I can't figure it out - it's hard to retain your head.'
- 'Body language of teachers - not able to interpret and respond properly - puts you off task.'
- 'It's scary when you don't know people and you don't have connections (in large mainstream classes).'

Lack of support from peers

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'I miss a lot of class. It's really really difficult. It's hard with my peers.' 'One thing that didn't help, one of my papers was biology ... the tutor thought we should have got it because it was Y12 material, but I never did that, and it was 20 years ago. I left crying plus there was a bully ... was bullied so they helped me come here to the main campus.' (Student with ADHD)
- 'I've been bullied since the beginning of this year.'
- 'There is a bully in our class and even though I brought it up with the tutor, nothing was done.'
- 'Two years ago, there was a bully in my class - it left an awful taste and I nearly pulled out. It was dealt with, but not without my name being shared, that should not have happened.'

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

More support for students experiencing mental health issues

The feedback from both disabled learners and support staff:

- 'The negative discourses (thoughts) I still held about from my childhood. Constantly living in fear, I was going to lose my home, not having enough to eat, not being able to understand or complete the work. Depression, not sleeping ... having to keep it all hidden as society judges you and discriminates against you.'
- 'Increasing the amount done with students with mental health issues is something we are working on too. And this is important in getting those learners to stay ... what is getting in the way of your study. It might be domestic violence getting in the way.'
- 'If you don't deal with it then you won't progress.' 'Mental health has grown - lots of self-diagnosis.' 'We're fortunate to have in-house counselling.'
- 'Mental health is a real issue and it's hard on a tutor to have to deal with it.' 'The first step is building a trusting relationship to overcome anxiety.'
- 'I had one guy in class who didn't declare, had an episode in class.'

Support when a disabled learner is struggling

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'I was given the opportunity to speak to the person in charge, I felt validated and heard.'
- 'My confidence grew when I was heard by the wellness officer.'
- (After Getting Behind) 'I have now met with my tutor and made a plan for the rest of my study.'
- 'If you are about to fail, the staff don't give up on you.'
- 'Success for me is having resilience. If you are strong, you will be able to get through.'
- 'I was hiding a lot of trauma, anxiety etc going into study about my past situation, particularly with my family. This led to counselling, which led to being tested for autism.'
- (Tutor Aide): 'Helped me hone in on the question. It is easy to get overloaded. You know what you want to explain - she helped me to get it down and organise the information.'
- 'It was really nice to sit down and work with her, I really enjoyed having her, she helped me focus on the task at hand.'
- 'I struggle with maths at school. I was told I didn't need help. I would get anxious (Big Issue). Here I can get help if I need it. It helps ... Teacher Aides provide reassurance, understanding, listen. Big Issue - Important ... People are encouraging, they tell you "You can do it," and you can.' (Student with ADHD/Asperger's)

Peer Support

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'Me and (friend) in a group, we go out and see stuff.' (Student with ADHD/Asperger's)
- 'I've got along with other students. Made some friends.' 'Felt way better starting here, knowing (friend) again ...'
- 'Another student inspired me... being accepted is a motivator.'
- 'I know everyone is here for study - but nice to have more lunchtime clubs to have a space from study to create a sense of belonging.'
- 'You want to be there for your classmates - nice to have feeling of helping others.'
- 'Making friends very important - knowing they are always going to be there for you.'
- 'During the study period we help each other - tutors are not able to help us as much.'
- 'Peer support is really important - we are a really tight group.'

<p>Opportunity 5</p>	<p>Financial hardship for some disabled learners and lack of funding for disability-related learning support:</p> <p>Some support staff and disabled learners are concerned that the current funding model for paying for learning support, particularly for those disabled learners with high support needs, is inadequate and this impacts on their ability to provide the right support for these learners.</p> <p>Many disabled learners also face financial hardship due to being on low incomes, benefits and having additional medical costs due to their impairments.</p> <p>Reviewing the current funding model so all tertiary providers have adequate funding to support in particular those disabled learners with high support needs and those who face financial hardship, would make a difference.</p>
	<p><i>How might the funding model remove financial barriers to disabled learners who face financial hardship and who have high supports needs?</i></p>

Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Poverty and financial hardship for some disabled learners

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'Transport is an issue. Petrol costs'
- Childcare - some of the disabled learners also had children and faced many of the issues that their non-disabled peers face studying and being a parent such as financial hardship, time, dealing with sick children, housing, and other constraints

Lack of funding for disability-related learning support

The feedback from disabled learners

- 'Peer mentoring is lecturer referral only. Only so many people can get it. It should not be capped when people need it.'
- 'For me, the higher up I go the harder it is. Not academically, but I'm a hard copy person, I need to print everything. COVID made it really hard.'
- 'Financially it is a big barrier.' (Student with ADHD)

The feedback from support staff:

- 'Funding model doesn't work.'
- 'Signing interpreter is expensive - students worry about the cost.' 'There's a circle at play in student's minds - freedom to learn vs cost of support.'
- 'Capped funding \$15k. (Student) has limited mobility ... Why should it take 8 years just because of the funding?'

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

More funding for learning support for disabled learners

The feedback from support staff:

- '(Wish) Funding for anything and everything to enable people. Students and staff.'
- 'Mindset shift to not only save money.'

Support with course fees and other costs, and financial information to make informed decisions about studying

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff:

- 'I'm thankful fees are free - I had to pull out of papers last year so I am grateful.'
- 'Fees free has been very helpful for me.' 'Fees free is a motivator.'
- 'Being awarded a study award in my first year (for having a disability)
- was a huge help ... Access to course related costs (which I ended up using to buy a washing machine after the first year).'
- 'The case workers I saw, none of them could not give me a clear answer about how much money I would be entitled to. This made it impossible to make an informed financial decision and commit to studying.'
- '(\$) I've seen so many learners fall over because they can't afford to study.'
- 'They drop out because they can't feed themselves (or pay their medical bills).'

Financial Allowances and withdrawal policies consider disabled learner needs

The feedback from support staff:

- 'An important enabler is being able to connect to StudyLink about the learner's mental health or other challenges to enable students to still get allowances and study less than full time, so they are not penalised financially.'
- 'Withdrawal for mental health issues - if they haven't passed over half their courses, they won't be eligible for a student allowance if they choose to come back.'

Opportunity 6	<p>Lack of Employment Pathways for disabled learners:</p> <p>Some of the disabled learners spoke about a range of barriers into employment. Often employer concerns hide the fact that some employers are not 'disability confident' and need more support. Unfortunately, these issues can have a negative impact on a disabled learner's confidence when it comes to considering employment. Some disabled learners also lack academic and other pathways that lead to employment. Unfortunately, many disabled people leave high school without qualifications and the foundation skills to have successful vocational education pathways and options for this. Being more intentional about assisting all disabled learners to gain qualifications and achieve their academic potential at high school would create more pathways and options for disabled learners into vocational education and onto employment. Because of lack of flexibility with assessments and exams not necessarily being the best way to assess the knowledge of some disabled learners, some disabled learners struggle to show their academic potential and to gain qualifications. This is a failure by the system and must be addressed. The evidence in this report suggests that once disabled learners have their impairments identified and they receive the right impairment-related support many achieve their academic potential. This has the potential to improve their employment pathways. Creating vocational education partnerships with disability employment agencies, internships programmes like Project SEARCH and the MSD Lead Toolkit could also assist with this.</p> <p><i>How might Te Pūkenga disabled learners gain qualifications that enable them to have equitable access to vocational learning pathways and employment?</i></p>
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Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Lack of Employment Opportunities

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'No jobs were available when I moved to the Hawkes Bay.'
- Employers want people that work quickly and get it perfect every time. But that doesn't always work.' (Disabled learner using a wheelchair)
- 'The only 'career' and job options she gave me was a day-care worker, or a garbage man. These options destroyed my confidence and self-worth. This experience left me full of fear and feeling like I was completely screwed. I had completely fallen 'through the cracks' as they like to say.'
- 'Having no qualification or worthwhile work experience meant even if I found a full-time job, I would be no better off being on the benefit and working part-time.'
- 'I was put on the spot and expected to have some idea of what I want to do for a job. Inside my head the idea of getting a 'job' terrified me.'

The feedback from support staff:

- '(Work placement) employers need to be educated in what they're getting.'
- 'What people want is 'work ready' employable people.'

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

More academic pathways providing preparation or leading to employment or further study

The feedback from support staff

- 'Sometimes students can go on a different path and develop other skills. We try to find something the student is really interested in and start from Level 4 - 5. The path will lead a student to employment, but by spending more time at L5 he may be able to come back later and complete higher study.'
- Preparation - 'A year in work placement might help some people be ready
- ... They might observe for a year (before or between programmes) ... before application or pre-programme, or between programmes, have a work placement ...'

More Employment Pathways

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff:

- 'Employability of disabled people is vitally important.' 'More work experience and more time would be good.'
- 'Wanting to look at changing careers and knowing that there were steppingstones.'
- 'Needed work experience while studying. 2 days a week full on just about killed me with my health. My next diploma integrated work experience into the course which worked a lot better.' (Student with ADHD with family responsibility)
- 'Wasn't ready for work - I found it terrifying.' (Student with Anxiety)

Opportunity 7	<p>Inaccessible Communication and Information:</p> <p>It is important tertiary providers consider the needs of disabled learners with different impairments when providing information and communication. The needs of disabled learners also need to be considered in the purchasing of digital platforms, software, and computers so that the online environment is also accessible to disabled learners, particularly those who use assistive technology.</p> <p>There are also some disabled learners who don't have the digital and computer literacy skills required for vocational education or access to devices, Wi-Fi, data, or a computer at home.</p>
	<p><i>How might all Te Pūkenga disabled learners gain digital and computer literacy skills and have access to information, communication and online technology that considers their needs?</i></p>

Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

Lack of Information about courses, academic requirements, or available learning support for disabled learners in accessible formats

The feedback from disabled learners:

- Last year's programme guide was confusing, so much to read, criteria, so much to submit.'
- 'I struggle with writing, and you have to learn to confirm the tutor's guidelines.'

The feedback from support staff:

- 'Sometimes younger (disabled) students aren't aware of disability support and say "yes I'm fine ...'
- 'One of the issues is the information for students - they don't know how the course will fit their needs.'
- 'Course information is written from the perspective of those without disabilities.'
- 'Can we work through the barriers in a course or is it the stopping point?' 'People don't realise the academic requirements and the entry requirements.'
- 'We have accepted someone who is only able to do one paper at a time. He wasn't fully capable when we accepted him.'

Inaccessible digital platforms and computer technology

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff:

- 'Disabled learners don't interact online'
- 'With enrolments online you can choose if you want to be contacted by disability support but on paper, you're not able to.'
- 'We need more accessible technology.'
- 'It's a digital world out there – they need those (digital) skills to be literate.'

Lack of access to computer devices, Wi-Fi and data can be a huge barrier for some disabled learners on low incomes

The feedback from support staff:

- 'A huge barrier to success is access to devices, Wi-Fi, data - some (disabled learners) don't have that.'

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

Access to information and communication that considers that there are disabled learners who require information and communication in alternative formats

The feedback from disabled learners:

- 'Communication needs to be respectful. Especially the emails. The emails need to be simplified for me.'
- 'I had no idea what I was doing. Got the forms, way better on paper than online.'
- 'I had 101 help, having someone explain different details to the tutors ... It would be helpful if there was more writing down stuff so I could take my own notes ...'

Developing the computer literacy skills of all disabled learners

The feedback from support staff:

- 'Computing removes literacy and numeracy barriers.'
- 'Computer Literacy: When they get the tools they can excel.'

Opportunity 8	Inaccessible physical environment for disabled learners: Some current disabled learners are struggling with the physical access environment at the campus they attend. This impacts on the time it takes for these disabled learners to move around these campuses.
	<i>How might Te Pūkenga ensure all disabled learners can access a physical environment that considers their needs?</i>

Barriers that Disabled Learners Experience

The feedback from disabled learners and support staff:

- 'I am always getting stuck in lifts ... I am constantly having to ask people to hold the door or the lift ... Other learners who use lifts don't need it ...'
- 'The campus layout is a steep site which makes it hard to get around.'
- 'We have an entire block that's not physically accessible ... non accessible building, we have had 7 that have injured themselves ... Our doors are heavy. This is a very hard to negotiate ... inaccessibility of heavy doors ...' 'Access to facilities is difficult due to the lifts being full and it taking so much
- time to move around campus.'

Enablers to Resolve these Barriers

- 'It's important they know physical barriers - many don't know when they enrol.'
- a. Disabled learners visiting a campus prior to enrolment to determine any barriers to physical access and access routes.
 - b. Development of Physical Access Plan, committing funds each year to a prioritised list of physical access provisions. In partnership with disabled learners and support staff.
 - c. Completing regular physical access audits.

The feedback from support staff:

- 'It's important they know physical barriers - many don't know when they enrol.'

Appendix B: E hāngai ana ki te Kaituhi / About the Author

Grant Cleland has over 30 years' experience supporting disabled people and their whānau. He has held a range of management and other roles providing services in tertiary education, employment, social work, health, contracting and auditing, at both national and local levels.

Born with a physical impairment and using a wheelchair for mobility from childhood, Grant therefore brings both lived and professional experience.



Grant's company, Creative Solutions provides disability-related advice, support, and training for private, state and NGO organisations, disabled people, those with health conditions and their whānau.

Grant also has extensive experience in Governance, Leadership and Social Change, Project Management, Strategic Planning and Training. He has specialist expertise in employment, transition, and tertiary education for disabled people.

Grant's experience in the tertiary and vocational education sectors include:

1. 9.5 years as Chief Executive of Workbridge: This is the largest specific employment agency for disabled people and those with health conditions in New Zealand. Grant was responsible for the development of various partnerships with tertiary providers and large employers and an Internship Programme for disabled school leavers with Z Energy.
2. Project Lead, Kia Orite Toolkit, Tertiary Education Commission: This will provide a framework and toolkit to assist tertiary providers with the development of their Disability Action Plans. There is a strong link between this work and the analysis of feedback from disabled learners and their support staff for Te Pūkenga.
3. Careerforce Disability Advisory Group, Review of Health and Disability Qualifications.
4. Project Manager and Workplace Assessor for the National Diploma in Employment Support with Careerforce/NZDSN

Appendix C: Ngā Tohutoro | References

Accessibility Charter

<https://msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/accessibility/the-accessibility-charter.html#charter>

Alternative Assessment Arrangements <https://ako.ac.nz/knowledge-centre/alternative-assessment-arrangements/guidelines-and-procedures-for-alternative-assessment-arrangements/>

BarrierFree <https://www.barrierfree.org.nz/who-we-are>

Enabling Participation <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59152c88b8a79bdb0e644f2a/t/5d23e80aaa03990001fd301a/1562634296418/Enabling+Participation+Comic+final+medium+resolution+with+credit.pdf>

MSD Lead Toolkit

<https://www.msd.govt.nz/about-msd-and-our-work/work-programmes/lead-programme-work/lead-toolkit/index.html>

Project Search

<http://www.projectsearch.nz>

The Principles of Universal Design in Education: <https://www.adcet.edu.au/disability-practitioner/course-design-and-implementation/universal-design>



Te Pūkenga