

IMAGINE

“Creativity is intelligence having fun”
— ALBERT EINSTEIN

Disability Information & Support Newsletter: Issue 1, 2021



Kia ora and welcome to “Imagine”, Disability Information and Support’s newsletter. As many of you will know, our vision is to work in partnership to promote an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity, promotes comprehensive academic support and empowers individuals with impairments to achieve their full potential. Our vision has been extremely important this year, more so than any other, and you will see many examples of our vision in action throughout this newsletter.

2021 has been another very busy year for the team and we have seen a 45 per cent increase in students accessing our service. We remain committed to providing a quality support service that leads the way in the tertiary sector and I need to acknowledge we could not do all we do without the commitment, dedication and stability of our team, including our casual staff and note-takers.

We also value the many partnerships we have with students. As the proverb goes, **He aha te mea nui o te ao?** What is the most important thing in the world? **He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.** It is the people, it is the people, it is the people.

Looking ahead, next year will mark Disability Information and Support’s 30th Anniversary and we are proud that the University of Otago had the foresight to establish a formalised support service, long before it became an official requirement. This vision and clear commitment continues to ensure students with disabilities have an outstanding student experience while at Otago. We look forward to celebrating this wonderful milestone in 2022.

MELISSA LETHABY
MANAGER



IN THIS ISSUE:

- Introducing the DI&S team
- Appreciation Awards
- Student Profile
- Hands-On at Otago
- Be. Lab – student internship experiences

INTRODUCING THE TEAM

The values we operate by and the positive environment we foster derives from our vision to work in partnership to promote an inclusive environment that celebrates diversity, promotes comprehensive academic support, and empowers individuals with impairments to achieve their full potential.

Disability Information and Support consists of a team of warm and caring professionals who are committed to providing an exceptional service.

At present we have a dedicated team of 15 staff:

Melissa Lethaby	Manager
Jackie Fox	Learning Support Manager
Emma Holt	Student Advisor
Rebecca McFadyen	Student Advisor
Rachel 'Aluesi	Student Advisor
Emily Chatfield	Student Advisor
Claire Macindoe	Student Advisor (Fixed Term)
Toni Patterson-Gallagher	Note-taker Coordinator
Megan Kruskopf	Note-taker Coordinator
Ali Charlton	Tutor Coordinator
Janette Hart	Test/Exam Coordinator
Julie Black	Learning Support Assistant
Kelly Alexander	Administrator
Maria Apji	Administrator
Kerry Twemlow	Administrative Assistant



Back row: Melissa, Janette, Rachel, Emma, Jackie, Kelly, Rebecca, Emily and Claire
Front row: Julie, Ali, Maria and Meghan
Absent: Toni and Kerry

OTAGO STUDENTS AND STAFF RECOGNISED AT APPRECIATION AWARDS



Postgraduate students Akbordin Rattana, Brooke McIsaac-Williams, Charmaine Kwan and undergraduate student Emily Moreton (absent Sophie Vinicombe and Robert Henderson).
Photo: Sharron Bennett

“ It allows me to help students with disabilities to take examinations in an environment that effectively prevents the nature of their impairment from hindering their exam performance. ”

For postgraduate student Akbordin Rattana, being an alternative arrangement exams supervisor and helping students with impairments have equal access to examinations gives him great satisfaction.

Mr Rattana is one of the 13 recipients of the 2020 Disability Information and Support Appreciation Awards.

2020 was the 10th year of celebrating the individuals and teams from across the University for their contributions towards supporting students with impairments.

Mr Rattana first became involved with Disability Information and Support in 2010 as a note-taker for first semester. However, it was not until 2016 when he started his PhD that another student suggested he think about being a Supervisor for Alternative Arrangements.

His role involves supervising students with disabilities during examinations, usually in one-to-one sessions, where the exam environments are tailored to the needs of the student.

“It allows me to help students with disabilities to take examinations in an environment that effectively prevents the nature of their impairment from hindering their exam performance. It always gives me satisfaction to help them to take exams in an equal manner as other students do.”

In return, Mr Rattana says he receives a source of income to support his study as well as chances to learn about professional ethics and practice his English skills.

Receiving the award was quite a surprise for Mr Rattana.

He feels very thankful to the staff at Disability Information and Support for choosing him to receive the award.

"I recalled their many kindnesses to me and aspired to maintain a strong work ethic such as honesty, punctuality, and dogged perseverance."

Undergraduate student Sophie Vinicombe has always been a thorough note-taker, happy to share her notes with friends, so when an email came in asking for note-takers in one of her classes in semester 1 last year, she was glad to help others benefit from her notes.

"I'll also admit that knowing that I was writing notes for someone else led me to stay on-task in lectures, so it helped me too."

Sophie feels lucky to have never had any difficulties in taking notes or keeping focused in lectures, so she believes it's important to help others who may struggle. She was both surprised and grateful to receive the award.

"Even when I was sending through my notes, I would often forget that someone was on the other end, and people would actually be using them, so this was such a nice surprise."

Manager of Disability Information and Support Melissa Lethaby says her team could not achieve all they do without their tutors, note-takers, test and exam staff, departmental contacts, and their champions and allies in the wider University.

"2020 marks the 10th anniversary of our Appreciation Awards and that itself is something to celebrate, as for 10 years we have been able to acknowledge and thank those who commit to working with us."

Disability Information and Support prides itself on working in partnership with students and this model sets us apart for others in the tertiary sector, she says.

"Our partnership model enables students and staff to benefit from each other's experiences, insights and expertise. Quite simply, we love the vibrancy and enthusiasm of students and we strive to ensure they have an outstanding experience while they are at Otago."

ARTICLE:
LISA DICK, STAFF BULLETIN

DISABILITY INFORMATION AND SUPPORT'S APPRECIATION AWARD RECIPIENTS 2020

Dave Scott
Proctor

For providing exceptional support and guidance to staff and students

Geoff Burns
Deputy Proctor

For providing exceptional support and guidance to staff and students

Harlene Hayne
Vice-Chancellor

For creating an environment where diversity is celebrated and students thrive

Robert Henderson
Postgraduate student

For providing outstanding support to both students and staff

Erin Janssen
Alumna

For providing first-class tutoring support to students

Hayden Kubala
Student Development

For providing outstanding support and advice to students and staff

Charmaine Kwan
Postgraduate student

For being an exceptional supervisor for alternative arrangements

Brooke McIsaac-Williams
Postgraduate student

For providing first-class tutoring support to students

Emily Moreton
Undergraduate student

For being an outstanding peer note-taker

Jeff Ormandy, Jon Bracey, Gemma Geddes and Inge Walgern
eConferencing

For providing outstanding, timely advice and support to students and staff

Akbordin Rattana
Postgraduate student

For being an exceptional supervisor for alternative arrangements

Paul Trebilco
Centre for Theology and Public Issues

For providing exemplary and compassionate support to students

Sophie Vinicombe
Undergraduate student

For being an outstanding peer note-taker

STUDENT PROFILE: CAMARADERIE, OPTIONS AND HELP

Charlotte Boyle is a Zoology and Psychology major at the University of Otago. Initially intending only to study Zoology due to her high school passion for Biology, Charlotte discovered the Psychology Department at random. "When I was reading up on the research that gets done here at Otago in the Psychology Department, I thought it sounded so interesting," she said. For the time being, she is planning to keep her options open but would like to work in wildlife preservation.

While still in high school Charlotte was diagnosed with Ehlers-Danlos syndrome, a connective tissue disorder that causes joint pain, nerve damage and fatigue. Charlotte explained that her case is "fairly mild" as some with the syndrome require surgery to repair joint damage. However mild her symptoms are, Charlotte's education experience has not been without its challenges. When she was in high school she was not aware of the exam accommodations available. She sat exams as usual, finding that she had a difficult time writing enough as her wrist and shoulder would get tired and she needed constant breaks. Later when she did eventually discover these supports, they didn't feel very organised; "I felt really lost and wasn't sure what exactly I was entitled to and how it all worked." Additionally, due to her fatigue, she regularly took naps in class, "I think I slept through almost every physics lesson in my last year at high school because I just could not keep my head up." This experience was particularly challenging because she was unaware of the supports available to her to ensure she was not missing parts of her education.

A self-described "big nerd", Charlotte has always enjoyed studying and found university education rewarding. "Last year I especially enjoyed all the practical elements of a BSc - I had labs every week where I got to work with specialty equipment and run experiments and even help out with research for post-grad students." She found this hands-on experience exciting, as opposed to trying to stay focused during lectures.

Charlotte feels lucky because she lives with other students with similar symptoms to her. "It's great because first of all, the flat is completely accessible since we all have the same



needs," she said. However, more than this, it is the social support she receives from her peers that makes a big difference to her experience: "It means that if one of us is having a bad day, we can complain about it and everyone knows exactly what they're talking about because they were experiencing that exact symptom yesterday, so there's this big sense of camaraderie between us." Solidarity with others in a similar situation has played a major role in helping Charlotte in her university life.

Furthermore, Disability Information and Support has been a significant help to her. "Whenever a problem crops up, like a timetabling issue or assessment conditions, it's been super easy to just come in a talk to someone to get it solved." The Student Advisors

have been instrumental in advocating for her. Additionally, Charlotte has found the notetaking service especially helpful, as she explains: "It means I can focus all my attention on understanding what the lecturer is saying, rather than rushing to try and write notes."

Charlotte emphasises the importance of ensuring students are aware of what is available to them. She suggests that lecturers and tutors be proactive in keeping students informed of what is available to them. "On the first day of lectures, tell your students what they should do if they have an impairment and need something changed or extra help." She emphasises that not every student has contact with Disability Information and Support and may not be aware of the support available to them, or who to contact should they need assistance. "Lecturers and tutors should open that dialogue for students so they don't feel as intimidated asking for what they need."

For anyone considering study, Charlotte advises asking as many questions as possible. "Ask Halls you're applying to how they would be able to accommodate you, ask course coordinators if there's flexibility around assessments, ask Disability Information and Support about the services they provide." Once she sought help, Charlotte found that it was easy to come by. "You'll be surprised by how easy it is to get what you need if you just ask for it."

“Whenever a problem crops up, like a timetabling issue or assessment conditions, it's been super easy to just come in a talk to someone to get it solved.”

HANDS-ON AT OTAGO - A TASTE OF UNIVERSITY LIFE



Laila, Eve and Corbin.

The 2021 Hands-On at Otago programme saw that “393 students from around New Zealand were treated to a week of learning and fun,” says Benji Ahdar, events specialist from the External Engagement Division. Hands-On at Otago is a programme which brings high school students onto campus for a week during the summer to give them a taste of the University of Otago student experience. Students participate in a wide range of classes and experiences, ranging from “deer knee dissections in the Anatomy project to mock arrests at the Dunedin Police Station in the Law Project,” explains Benji.

The Imagine Beyond scholarship, sponsored by Disability, Information and Support, provides funds for students to attend the Hands-On event. Three recipients, Eve, Corbin and Laila, all gave feedback on how they found the programme. Eve was able to pursue her passion for History through the event, going to both the Toitū Otago Settlers Museum and Hocken Library to “research the lives of historic people using their artifacts.” They also “took a walking tour of the scarfie flats and explored historic toilets using virtual reality.” Laila, who took Microbiology classes, was able to conduct “interesting and informative experiments about bacteria and even blood cells.” Corbin too, enjoyed the project available through the Mathematics and Statistics classes, as he “was able to learn about a number of different applications to everyday life and hear about a few of the pathways for further study.” These classes give students the opportunity to see what classes might be like, as well as give them an understanding of the practical aspects of their chosen subjects.

One part of the Hands-On experience is participating in the afternoon Snack programme, where students are signed up to try out completely different subjects to what they plan to enrol in. Eve found that while she had not considered taking Botany, Science Communication and Languages, these Snacks “provided some cool experiences, such as learning how to say hello in five different languages and scripting a science-based

film.” Overall, she “really appreciated the knowledge I gained and the fun I had during these activities.”

Not only do students get to experience classes during this week, but they also get to sample living in a Hall of Residence and associated events. Eve explained that “every evening there was a new way to discover Otago and learn more about the University.” These activities included “an Amazing Race, a public lecture, an activity evening and a quiet night in, where we spoke to University staff and students and learnt more about different subjects and opportunities.” Laila valued making new friendships and connections through the experience, enjoying sharing meals at her Hall, and using free time to “to explore the vibrant, bustling township of Dunedin together.”

Making connections with peers is one of the major benefits of the Hands-On at Otago experience. Corbin said that the “opportunity to discuss ideas with likeminded people was invaluable.” Eve found her time at Otago “unforgettable”, and that it was an opportunity to explore “new experiences and friends.” Particularly, one of the events, a disco on the last night, stood out to her as an “awesome way to have some fun with my new friends and my friends from home and made the last night on camp so much better.” Laila also appreciated the opportunity to make friends and connections. “I was able to make some truly amazing friends from all around the world including Malaysia and China to name a few,” she said. “I made some amazing and hopefully lifelong memories and friends.”

Hands-On at Otago is a valuable experience for any students considering attending the University of Otago. This event gives a taster of student life, the opportunity to make friends with others potentially attending Otago ahead of time, and to settle their decision on where they want to explore their tertiary education. For Eve, “Hands-On at Otago was the best way for me to gain a better insight into the university, while also meeting new friends and having a great time.”

NEWS BITES

If you are studying in 2021 or beyond you might find the following information useful!

THE LOCALS PROGRAMME

The Locals Programme may interest you if you are a University of Otago student who is in their first year of study and living in Dunedin either at home, boarding, renting or flatting. It is designed to create an enjoyable and supportive first year experience for new students who are not living in Residential Colleges. Students are able to access academic, social, sporting and community-based opportunities through the programme. It is a great way to make new friends and find out more about the academic support available to students.

For more information, and to register for Locals, please click on the following link: <http://www.otago.ac.nz/locals/index.html>.

STUDENT LEARNING DEVELOPMENT (SLD)

SLD provides academic support to all students studying at the University. This support is free and confidential and available to both undergraduate and postgraduate students. Comprehensive information is available on their website at <http://slc.otago.ac.nz/> and includes details about their workshops, PASS (Peer Assisted Study Sessions) programme, Peer Writing support groups and Conversational English groups. Students are also able to check out the SLD calendar to see which events and workshops are coming up.

STUDENT HEALTH

Student Health consists of a team of qualified professionals who provide high quality health care to students at the University of Otago. A comprehensive range of primary health care services, including doctor, nurse, mental health and well-being and psychiatry appointments are available to students. For additional information about these services you can check out their website at <http://www.otago.ac.nz/studenthealth>. Student Health can also be contacted on 0800 479 821.

OTAGO UNIVERSITY STUDENTS ASSOCIATION'S STUDENT SUPPORT CENTRE

The Student Support Centre at OUSA provides a free and confidential service designed to assist students who are experiencing issues that are impacting on their studies. You can find out more information about the support they provide by visiting their website at <https://www.ousa.org.nz/support> or contacting them on 479 5449.

HEALTHY CAMPUS RECREATION MAGAZINE

The Healthy Campus Recreation magazine is a fantastic resource. It includes information on the 50 plus courses, competitions and activities available to students each semester. Check out the following link to view a copy of the magazine.

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/recreation/about/magazine/index.html>

SCHOLARSHIP INFORMATION

N G STEWART SCHOLARSHIP

\$1,500

One scholarship

Closing date 15 January

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/database/otago0146531.html>

UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO DONNA-ROSE MCKAY ENTRANCE SCHOLARSHIP

\$6,000

Closing date 5 December

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/database/otago033024.html>

JOHN F WARD SOUTHLAND ENTRANCE SCHOLARSHIP

\$6,000

Opening date 1 July, closing date refer to the following website as TBC

<https://www.otago.ac.nz/study/scholarships/database/search/otago713692.html>

IMPORTANT DATES

ALTERNATIVE EXAMINATION ARRANGEMENTS

deadline for applications 7 September

MENTAL HEALTH AWARENESS WEEK

27 September to 3 October

SEMESTER TWO EXAMS

20 October to 13 November

OTAGO DISABLED STUDENTS' ASSOCIATION (ODSA)

On Friday 30th July, the Otago Disabled Students' Association (ODSA) held their official launch event in the Main Common Room at the University of Otago. They were ecstatic to have seen ODSA come to fruition at the beginning of this year, after years of hard work by their executive and supporters. Although they have been affiliated as a group and officially running for just over nine months, this event was an opportunity for them to celebrate the milestone that is the beginning of this club, while they showcased their mahi and the community that they are building here at Otago.

Lauren, President of ODSA, expressed a special thank you to the main sponsor, University of Otago's Disability Information & Support; the wonderful MC, Matt Matahaere; their photographer, TJ Andrews, who documented the evening perfectly; and their entertainment for the night, the lovely Lola Elvy. Lauren also thanked OUSA Clubs & Socs, Tea Total, Kind Company, Patti's & Cream, Bay Road, Burger Plant, Bunnings, and Unipol, for helping make their special night a success.

ODSA aims to embody its four key aims: inclusivity, accessibility, advocacy and allyship, and is a group for students from both the University of Otago and Otago Polytechnic who actively wish to have representation and hear the voices of disabled students in conversations of well-being and access, both on and off campus. ODSA also aims to advocate against ableism in the education system. Members may either identify as disabled students themselves or be an ally of the disabled community. They meet regularly throughout the semester and have events such as DisabiliTea; speaker sessions; wine & cheese; and documentary/ film screenings.

If you are keen to join them, or would like to know more, then get in touch on Instagram or Facebook at [@otagoDSA](https://www.instagram.com/otagoDSA), or flick them an email at otagoDSA@outlook.com.



Melissa Lethaby, Manager of Disability, Information and Support and the ODSA Executive Committee.

MEDICAL CROWDFUNDING IN AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND: SEEKING RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS



Online crowdfunding campaigns are an increasingly common way to fundraise for health-related expenses during times of illness, disability, or injury. Dr Susan Wardell of the Social Anthropology Programme at the University of Otago is conducting a study on crowdfunding in Aotearoa New Zealand alongside a team of research assistants. Information on the overall research project can be found here: <https://crowdfundedcare.org/>. Currently, they are recruiting people to survey about their experiences of engaging with crowdfunding campaigns as audiences. If you've looked at a health-related crowdfunding campaign sometime in the last year (whether or not you decided to donate) they would love to hear about it. The survey will take approx. 15 minutes, depending on how much detail given. You can find the survey here:

https://otago.au1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_0oDpvMN7FrkIK0e

Furthermore, they are looking for case study participants, to learn more about the experiences of campaign organisers, specifically in these two areas:

- Continuous Glucose Monitors for people with Type 1 Diabetes
- Gender-affirming healthcare for Trans (and NB) people

If you are currently running a crowdfunding campaign in one of these areas, or are considering starting one, they would love to hear from you. You can touch base with them via email:

crowdfundedcareresearch@otago.ac.nz

TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF EXAMS

Exercise. You may be thinking that you have no time for exercise, but even a ten minute stroll around the block could help to clear your head.

Keep hydrated. Keep a water bottle with you at all times. Try to avoid having too many drinks that contain high levels of caffeine and sugar, these can affect your sleep and lead to an energy crash later in the day.

Eat well. Your body needs regular fuel to keep that brain working. Be prepared, if you know you are heading into a full on study week, head to the supermarket and pick up some healthy study snacks. Healthy snack ideas could include fruit, banana chips, pretzels, nuts, carrots, humus, salsa and muesli bars.

Talk about it. If you are feeling stressed talk it through with a mate, a family member, or one of the counsellors at Student Health. They may have ideas or helpful strategies and sometimes just talking it out can help lighten the load.

Try to get a full night's sleep. Set up a relaxing routine before bed. This will help switch your mind from study-mode to sleep-mode.

Have a laugh. Sometimes a good laugh is the best way to unwind. Balance out all that serious studying with a comedy film or stream some comedy festival clips on YouTube.

Keep it in perspective. You can only do your best so set realistic goals and be proud that you are doing the best you can. When exams are over try not to dwell on things you may have missed, instead look for the positives.

Plan for fun. Start planning your holidays or what you'll do to celebrate when that last exam is completed. It's great to have something to look forward to.

Have a change of scenery. Try taking your readings to a café. Dunedin also has beautiful botanical gardens which make a lovely spot to sit and read on a sunny day.

BE. LAB - STUDENT INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCES

Be. Lab is an organisation working towards making New Zealand the most accessible country in the world by collaborating with local businesses and creating pathways for work experience and employment. They have a national internship programme which facilitates a 12-week fully funded work experience. Internship placements vary depending on the qualification and experience of each intern, as interns will be matched into an industry and position relevant to their area of study and their preferred role. These placements can be full or part-time, can occur any time throughout the year, and geographical location of the work experience is at the discretion of the participant. The internship offers support for both the interns and the organisation they are placed at as each intern is matched with an external mentor, while a Be. Lab Relationship Manager walks alongside the intern and host organisation throughout the duration of the placements.

Sara Mitchell is a Relationship Manager at Be. Lab, and explained that they were able to facilitate “work experience opportunities up and down the country in all sectors.” Furthermore, these internships were successful as “75% of the work experience opportunities have translated into either permanent or contract work with the host organisation.” The internships offered were within a wide range of sectors, including banking, law, professional services firms, IT, District Health Boards, Central and Local Government, pharmaceuticals and engineering, among many others.

Previous intern, Abby, shared her experience as a Be. Lab intern. Abby is a third-year student working towards a Bachelor of Science in Biochemistry with a minor in Chemistry. Through Be. Lab she was able to participate in an internship at Auckland Hospital for twelve weeks. The experience was positive for her; “This internship allowed me to gain a great deal of confidence in my work ability and get the opportunity to work in an environment in which I otherwise would not have had access.” Her internship saw her working within several different sections of the Biochemistry Department where she was “observing and partaking in the tests and procedures being run.” Significantly, this meant that Abby was able to test her academic knowledge by putting it into practice and apply it to a real-world environment; “I got to see how those behind the scenes in the hospital truly help those in need and in many circumstances save lives.” The most valuable part of the internship for Abby was that she had the opportunity to develop her practical skills and knowledge “beyond what I ever thought possible at this point in my degree.”

Abby found the programme very accommodating; “Be. Lab supported me well throughout the entire process of placing me in an internship and negotiated with my employers to get me the conditions I needed to successfully complete the internship with the restrictions of my medical conditions.” Overall, Abby felt that the internship assists in making these practical experiences accessible to those who need it. For her, the opportunity meant she was able to “gain experience and expertise that will prove vital in gaining employment after University.” Abby expressed that the internship boosts intern “confidence in themselves and their skills in their chosen industry.”

To apply for a Be. Lab internship applicants need to meet the following criteria:

- Identify as living with a long-term health condition, access need or injury (this includes invisible access needs, such as dyslexia, mental health and ASD)
- Be in their penultimate or final year of a Bachelor’s degree or higher
- Can be up to twelve months since graduating with at least a Bachelor’s degree or higher (not Diploma)
- Must be registered with the Disability Support office at their tertiary provider
- Must be a New Zealand citizen or resident
- Cannot be in receipt of weekly ACC payments

The internship programme is open for applications and any interested students can apply online at www.belab.co.nz.



Abby – Be. Lab intern.

“Be. Lab supported me well throughout the entire process...”

IMAGINE

Disability Information & Support Newsletter

CONTACT DETAILS

Please contact us directly if you have any enquiries.

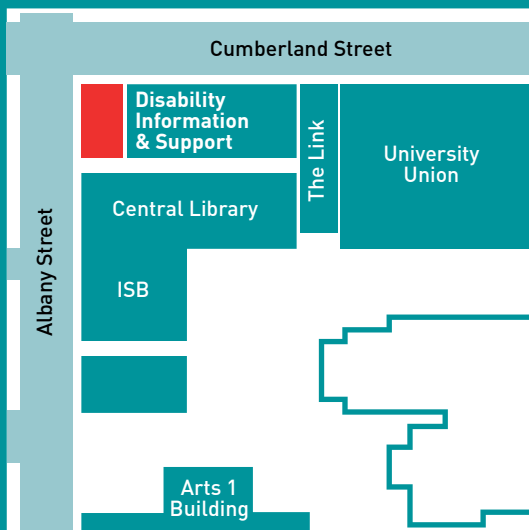
Disability Information and Support
University of Otago
PO Box 56
Dunedin 9054
New Zealand

Tel: 03 479 8235
or 0800 80 80 98

Email: disabilities@otago.ac.nz

Web: otago.ac.nz/disabilities

Office Hours: Monday – Friday 8.30am – 5.00pm



OUR PHYSICAL ADDRESS IS:

Disability Information & Support
West Lane
Information Services Building
Cnr Cumberland and Albany Streets
Dunedin

DI&S WEBSITE

If you are interested in reading more about the experiences of other students at Otago, have a look at the profiles on our website.

otago.ac.nz/disabilities/index.html

DI&S provides learning support, advice, advocacy and information to students who have a disability, impairment, injury or medical condition that affects their study, usually for a period of four weeks or more. Please look at our website for information about the services we provide.

otago.ac.nz/disabilities/services/index.html

In addition, our website allows you to provide confidential feedback on our service – just click on the following link.

otago.ac.nz/disabilities/questions/feedback/index.html