
University of Otago Learner Success Plan 2023–2030

This report lays out our plan to improve success for all learners at the University of Otago.

1. The future state we envision for our students.
2. The current state of learner success at Otago.
3. Our roadmap for improving learner success.



1. The future state we envision for our students

We have ambitious goals for improving the success of all learners who study at the University of Otago. We are currently leaders for Education Performance Indicators across the sector, and we are committed to implementing innovative and collaborative approaches to ensure learners from all backgrounds reach their full potential and have a mana-enhancing experience at Otago.

The Senior Leadership Team have articulated the University's vision for learner success:

Learners from all backgrounds and experiences are supported holistically to reach their full potential and grow to become innovative global citizens.

This vision for learner success is informed by the University's overarching vision to 2040:

Our people and knowledge transforming lives, connecting communities, and nurturing the environment in Otago, Te Waipounamu, Aotearoa, the Pacific and the world.

To help us achieve Vision 2040, the University has developed Pae Tata—our near horizon strategic plan that will guide us to 2030. Within this plan there are five domains. Our Learner Success Plan is situated within four of these domains:

- i. Provide compelling and viable educational offerings that deliver excellent student outcomes and experiences.
- ii. Whakamana i Te Tiriti o Waitangi.
- iii. Become a more global and connected University.
- iv. Support our people to achieve their best.

We provide compelling and viable educational offerings that deliver excellent student outcomes and experiences.

We are committed to achieving equity in student participation and achievement, streamlining our educational offerings, growing our student cohort and increasing its diversity, redefining our graduate attributes, and meeting student needs with best practice pedagogy. These commitments are woven through our Learner Success Plan.

Te whakamana i Te Tiriti o Waitangi

Our commitment to being a Te Tiriti led University means we will provide an environment in which tauira Māori can succeed, support our staff to engage with and embed te ao Māori in their teaching practices, and develop innovative ways for students to engage and learn with, and in, te ao Māori. This approach is underpinned by our partnership with mana whenua.

We will become a more global and connected University

We will increase our international student cohort and create transformative international experiences for our domestic students and deepen our relationship with alumni and partners.

We will support our people to achieve their best

The commitment and support of our outstanding staff is crucial to enhancing student success. We will embed a culture of working together, support diversity and ensure students thrive through the unique Otago experience. We will support our staff to succeed, grow and build the capability of our leaders at all levels.

Our University frameworks enable our Learner Success Plan to meet its strategic imperatives

University frameworks provide targeted actions that will enable us to achieve specific strategic priorities for our staff and students.

Māori Strategic Framework: Ngā Whakahaerenga Pai: Quality Programmes and Teaching, Nga Taonga Tuku Iho: Te Reo and Tikanga Māori, and Te Taumata Angitu Māori: Māori Student Success.

Pacific Strategic Framework: Academic Excellence: Strengthening targeted supports to increase levels of participation, retention and completions, enhanced Pacific programmes, curriculums and pedagogies, and increased Pacific staffing levels.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Framework: The University recognises Māori as tangata whenua and is committed to upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi. The University will provide a safe, supportive, respectful and inclusive environment for all members of its community, and recognises its role in cultivating that environment. The University values equity and diversity, and opposes discrimination based on individual attributes.

We have set aspirational goals for our learners

We have ambitious goals for improving rates of learner success at Otago. Whilst the University is the leader in education performance indicators across the sector, academic achievement is not currently equitable across all student groups (see Table 3 for further detail). TEC has directed the tertiary sector to look at areas where gaps have persisted over time. These gaps persist for students from Māori and Pacific communities and disabled students, among others. There is more work to be done to provide equitable experiences for these groups of students.

By 2030 we aim to achieve the targets in the five measures presented in Table 1.

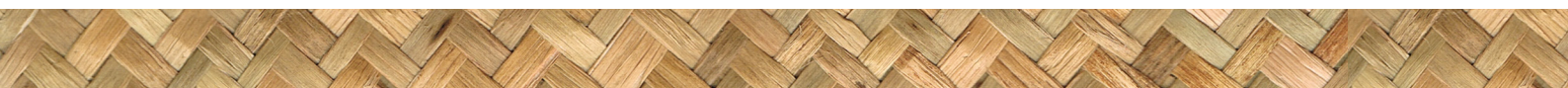


Table 1. Student success indicators and 2030 targets

	Indicators	Targets by 2030 ¹
1	Raise first year undergraduate student paper pass rate for priority ² student groups	87%
2	Raise first year undergraduate student retention rates for priority student groups	85%
3	Raise qualification completion rate for priority student groups	76%
4	All student groups report a strong sense of belonging to the University community	80% ³
5	Tauira Māori report they feel their Māori identity and culture are valued at the University Pacific students report they feel their unique Pacific identity and culture are valued at the University	Measure and baseline to be established ⁴

¹ Targets are the current success rates for non-Māori, non-Pacific student cohort.

² Priority student groups as determined by TEC are Māori, Pacific and students with a disability.

³ Our target for 'sense of belonging' is aspirational. Our current level for non-Māori, non-Pacific student cohort is 69%. The measure represents the percentage of respondents who 'Agree' or 'Strongly Agree' with the statement, 'I feel that I belong at the University of Otago'.

⁴ Pae Tata identified the importance of a students' unique identity and culture being recognised and valued while studying at Otago. The Strategy, Analytics and Reporting Office and the Quality Advancement Unit will develop a baseline measure which will be integrated into an existing survey.

Why we measure sense of belonging

There is a growing body of research that suggests that a sense of belonging is associated with many positive academic outcomes for college students—including that a sense of belonging can improve student engagement and performance.¹ For example, a study published in the journal *Research in Higher Education* reported that students with a higher sense of belonging than their peers tended to also have higher emotional and behavioural engagement.²

¹ H. Korpershoek, E. T. Canrinus, M. Fokkens-Bruinsma & H. de Boer (2020) The relationships between school belonging and students' motivational, social-emotional, behavioural, and academic outcomes in secondary education: a meta-analytic review, *Research Papers in Education*, 35:6, 641-680.

² Gillen-O'Neel, C. (2021) Sense of Belonging and Student Engagement: A Daily Study of First- and Continuing-Generation College Students. *Res High Education* 62, 45-71.

Our vision for learner success represents the aspirations of our stakeholders

During the creation of Vision 2040, the University undertook extensive consultation with mana whenua, Pacific communities, our students, staff, alumni, and many others. The development of our Learner Success Plan built upon this strong foundation of stakeholder engagement, and gained additional insights from a broad range of stakeholders—including student groups and associations, teaching staff, the Māori Centre Te Huka Mātauraka, Pacific Islands Centre, Disability Information and Support, Student Experience, Student Services and the Student Transition Network through the use of focus groups.

Our vision for learner success is owned and driven by our Council and senior leadership

Our University leadership set the direction for learner success in the Learning and Teaching Strategic Imperative in Vision 2040. The University's key focus is a commitment to ensuring that students from all backgrounds are empowered and supported to realise their educational goals and reach their full potential.

The Council and senior leadership team have been instrumental in guiding the development of the Learner Success Plan and will regularly monitor the implementation and key indicators going forward.

2. The current state of learner success at Otago

Our extensive and outstanding support systems have positioned Otago as the sector leader in Education Performance Measures

We have established a robust system of supports for students as they transition to university life, undertake their journey of study and complete their qualifications. These systems and the capable support provided by our dedicated staff ensure the best outcome for each student, and have enabled Otago to consistently be a leader across all Education Performance Measures published by the TEC.

Data in Table 2 shows course completion rates, retention to second year and the qualification completion rates for 2022—as well as our rank among other universities and the New Zealand mean rates. This data illustrates the success of our current systems and the effectiveness of our processes to support student success.

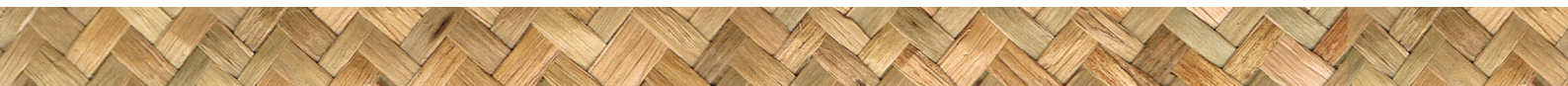


Table 2. 2022 first year retention, course and qualification completion by ethnicity.

	Otago Results	Otago Rank	NZ Mean
Non-Māori or Pacific students			
First-year retention	84%	1	80%
Course completion	90%	1	89%
Qualification completion	76%	1	69%
Māori tauira			
First-year retention	80%	2	71%
Course completion	83%	2	80%
Qualification completion	64%	1	53%
Pacific students			
First-year retention	80%	2	72%
Course completion	72%	=2	68%
Qualification completion	56%	1	47%

Source: TEC Education Performance Indicators, Ngā Kete



We need to do more to lift success of all learners

In our Vision 2040 we state:

“Continued success requires responsiveness to a changing world. Provision of learning and curriculum expectations are evolving significantly, responding to an array of factors including technological developments, societal shifts, and changes in the nature and expectations of the student cohort.”

Despite our successes, there are still gaps in achievement for our priority groups for first year paper pass rates, retention to second year of study, and qualification completion rates (Table 3). Closing these gaps is the focus of our Learner Success Plan.

Table 3. Indicators, targets, and current success rates

Lead indicators	Target ¹ by 2030	Current success rates in 2022		
		Māori	Pacific	Disabilities
Raise first year undergraduate student paper pass rate for priority student groups	87%	77%	61%	83%
Raise first year undergraduate student retention rates for priority student groups	85%	80%	80%	84%
Raise qualification completion rate for priority student groups	76%	64%	56%	69%
All student groups report a strong sense of belonging to the University community	80% ²	68%	71%	68%

¹ The target is based on the current success rates for the non-Māori, non-Pacific student cohort.

² Our target for 'sense of belonging' is aspirational.

A learner-centric approach is required

Gaps in achievement for our priority groups have unfortunately been consistent across the university sector and have persisted over time. The reasons for these persistent equity gaps in learner success are varied and involve complex interactions between internal and external factors. A one-size-fits-all approach to learner success is no longer effective, and it is critical we adopt a learner-centric approach that recognises and values the unique context of each student and their journey with us at Otago.

An example of our learner-centric approach is the appointment of three new roles within the University Library to work alongside Te Huka Mātauraka and the Pacific Islands Centre to improve outcomes for Māori and Pacific students. These roles will support students' transition to university and their sense of belonging, and boost their skills in accessing key resources to lift academic achievement.

What is working well

The University of Otago has earned its recognition as a leader in learner success in New Zealand through the development and implementation of a robust system of student support and transition programmes. Initiatives include our Māori Centre Te Huka Mātauraka, the Pacific Islands Centre, our Disability Information and Support, and other student advisory units which are supported by talented and dedicated staff. These groups deliver a broad spectrum of support as well as bespoke interventions tailored to the needs of individual students. These programmes undergo regular review and evaluation and have been shown to improve students' academic achievement and wellbeing. In the 2022 Student Opinion Survey: Support Services Improvement Report, over 90 per cent of students gave a positive assessment of the support services (including disability services) provided by the University.

Participation in University of Otago Health Professional programmes increased 124 per cent for Māori students and 121 per cent for Pacific students between 2010–2016 ³. Achieving these results involved four overarching factors all working together: investment, specific strategies and policies to increase engagement with Māori and Pacific communities, appointment of Māori and Pacific staff to key leadership roles, and effective understanding of critical race theory and the historical and social context of our diverse student backgrounds ⁴. This has been identified as an area of success that we aim to expand to other areas of the University and is action four in our Learner Success Plan.

In more recent years, we have trialled several programmes to look more closely at why some students struggle and have piloted several programmes to identify and respond to these needs. One example is a tailored approach for students who have not passed their first semester course work. Staff at Te Huka Mātauraka and the Pacific Islands Centre now have the information required to reach out to Māori and Pacific students and provide the necessary support with an understanding of the cultural and social context the student sits within. The number of students receiving mid-year academic progress alerts has decreased by 21 per cent between 2022 and 2023. Further optimisation of this work is noted as action three of our Learner Success Plan.

In our Learner Success Plan, we will build on these programmes and others, and will trial innovative learner-centric approaches to respond to the unique needs of our students.

³ P. Crampton, N. Weaver, A. Howard (2018) Holding a mirror to society? Progression towards achieving better sociodemographic representation among the University of Otago's health professional students, Vol 131 No 1476.

⁴ P. Crampton, J. Baxter, Z. Bristowe (2021) Selection of Māori students into medicine: re-imagining merit. Exploring some of the sociological reasons that might explain the exclusion of Māori from the medical workforce, Vol 134 No 1543.

Findings from the TEC Learner Success Diagnostic Tool

To help us develop a relevant and targeted Learner Success Plan, we used the Diagnostic Tool developed by the TEC to define our ideal state, assess our current state, and identify opportunities to improve across seven key areas of capability.

We undertook extensive consultation with staff and students over several months and analysed our data on equity gaps by paper, programme major and academic division to understand areas of success and gaps in achievement. We also studied survey data to gain deeper insights into the student and graduate experience at Otago. Below we outline our findings from each of the seven key areas of capability.

1. People, culture, and leadership: We found a robust culture of learner success among staff and leadership. Many staff consistently go out of their way to ensure a student-centric response and take genuine care and pride in providing highly responsive support to students. This is true of both teaching, support staff and leadership. Our senior leaders are focused on sharing successful practices more broadly to enable a more connected approach and applying innovations from across the sector.

2. Data and Technology: We found that our access to and use of data needs improvement. Often sufficient data is available, but how it is accessed and applied needs to be more student centric. Good data analysis needs to accompany the robust consultations we carry out.

- We need to consistently evaluate and document learner success initiatives and make this data more widely available within and between departments and divisions.
- Our technology doesn't always enable us to meet student needs in ways that are now possible with fit-for-purpose technology and software systems. We are constantly improving in this area, but the investment and the pace of change required has been a challenge. If we don't continue to transform our student-focused technology at a faster pace, we will soon struggle to meet student needs.

3. Guided pathways: We identified the need to make it easier for students to navigate the University. Some of our systems are unnecessarily complex and not learner-centric, including degree structures, the online environment and access to support services.

4. Holistic learner supports: We found that Otago provides a strong network of holistic student supports that are constantly evolving and improving, and have student success at the heart. These supports are tailored to students' needs, particularly for Māori, Pacific, disabled and international students. We can work on making the services more visible and accessible. Through our Disability Action Plan we will develop a focused set of initiatives to ensure disabled students continue to achieve their full potential.

5. Learner-centric systems: We identified that robust systems are in place for change management. External reviews are used where necessary to complement our rigorous internal quality review programme. Our policies are responsive to the changing environment we operate in.

6. Teaching and learning: We are about to start a refresh of our Learning and Teaching plan which will have renewed focus on the diversity of student needs, including pedagogical and structural approaches.

7. Partnerships: Throughout the development of Vision 2040 and Pae Tata we have placed partnerships at the forefront of how we operate. This model enables us to be responsive to the needs of our community. Staff are encouraged and empowered to work collaboratively across the sector to achieve the best outcomes for Aotearoa New Zealand.

Through this process we identified our focus areas, enablers, and key actions that are outlined in the following section.

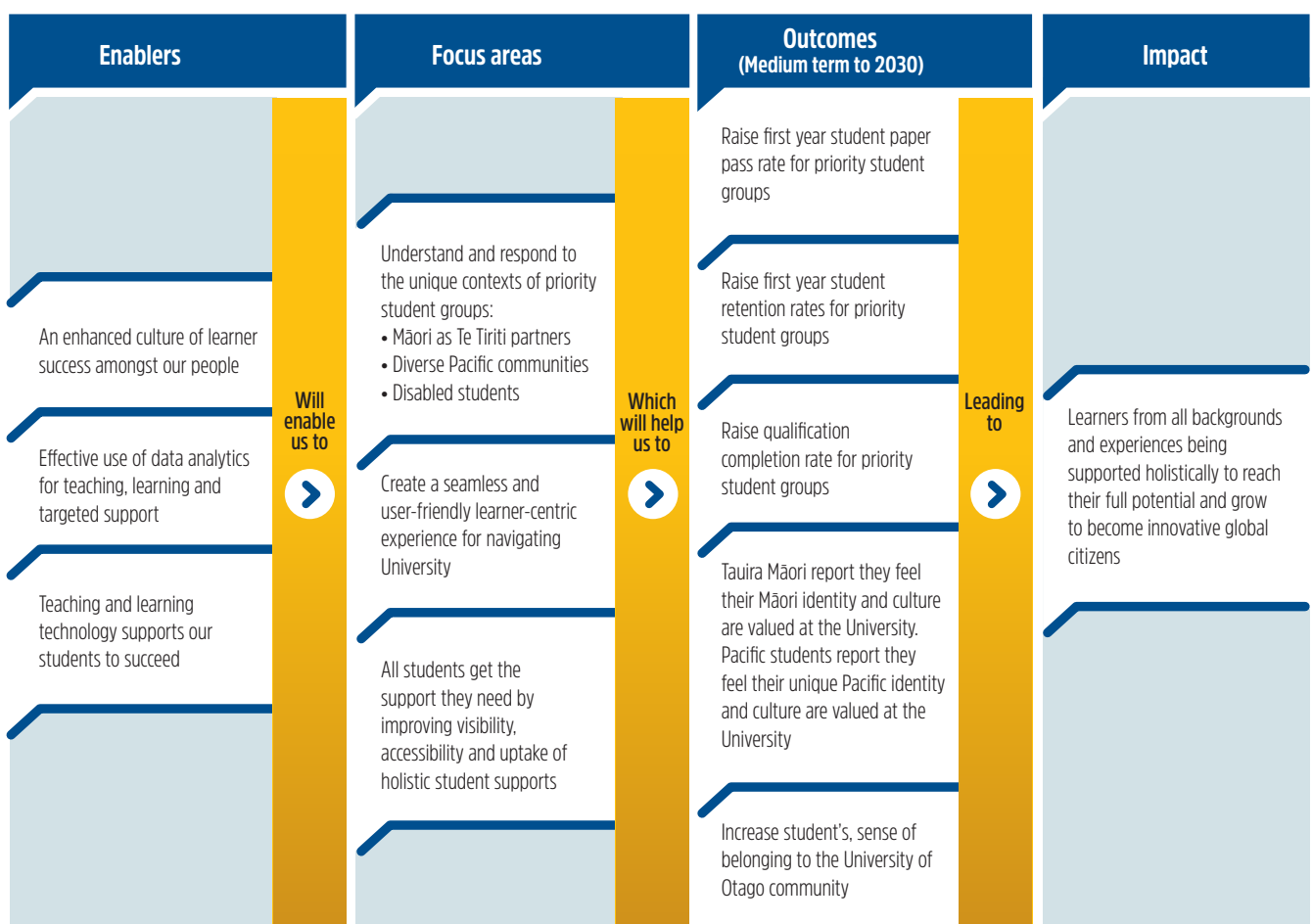
3. Our Roadmap for improving learner success

Our biggest opportunities to make a difference

To reduce the persistent equity gaps, we have created an Otago-specific Pathway to Impact that will enable us to focus our resources and lift individual learner success.

The Pathway to Impact is based on the findings discussed above and sets out how our chosen interventions will better enable our key outputs and facilitate our medium and ultimately longer-term impact. This work will be overseen by our Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) who will regularly report to the senior leadership team and the University Council.

University of Otago Learner Success Pathway to Impact 2023–2030



This Pathway is empowered through our partnerships with mana whenua, iwi, Pacific communities, industry, government, and local communities.

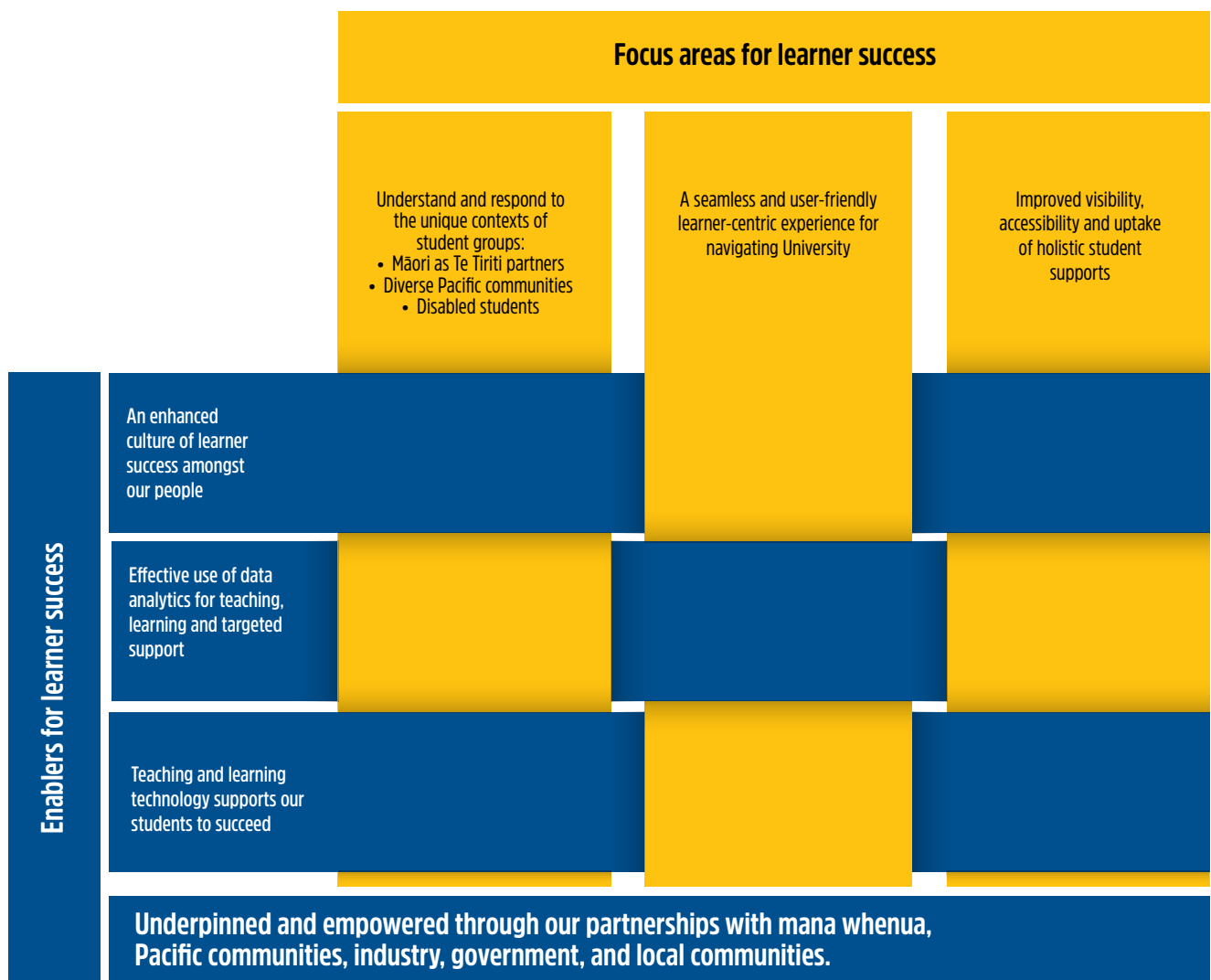
Our Framework

Our Roadmap to 2030 is driven by our interwoven Learner Success Framework that reflects a whole-of-University approach to improving outcomes for our students.

The three areas we have identified as critical for creating change are: understanding and responding to the unique context of priority student groups; developing a seamless and user-friendly learner-centric experience for navigating the University; and improved visibility, accessibility and uptake of holistic student supports.

These critical areas will require University-wide enablers to be achieved. The key enablers we have identified are: creating an enhanced culture of learner success amongst our people; effective use of data analytics for teaching, learning and support; and upgrading our teaching and learning technology to support our students to succeed. Effective ongoing evaluation will support us to achieve our ambitious goals for learner success.

Figure 1. University of Otago Framework for Learner Success: Interwoven focus areas and enablers



These focus areas and enablers, while tailored to our specific context, align with the Tertiary Education Commission's Ōritetanga Learner Success in seven key areas of capability as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. University of Otago Learner Success Framework alignment with TEC Ōritetanga seven areas of capability

University of Otago focus areas and enablers	TEC Ōritetanga 7 areas of capability						
	People, culture and leadership	Data and technology	Guided pathways	Holistic learner supports	Learner-centric systems	Teaching and learning	Partnerships
Understand and respond to the unique contexts of priority student groups	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
A seamless and user-friendly learner-centric experience for navigating University	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Improved visibility, accessibility and uptake of holistic student supports	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
An enhanced culture of learner success amongst our people	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Effective use of data analytics for teaching, learning and support	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	
Teaching and learning technology supports our students to succeed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Underpinned and empowered through our partnerships	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓

Our implementation approach

The focus areas and enablers weave together and will not follow a linear delivery timeline. We will begin the Focus Area actions with the tools, data and resources we currently have available and use insights from this work to inform the ongoing development of data and technology tools, and to enhance our culture of learner success. A key focus of lifting success is evaluation and continuous improvement.

Our Learner Success Plan Timeline 2023–2030 sets out our target time frames for implementation and will enable robust reporting to the Senior Leadership Team and the University Council. This timeline is provided on page 15–16 and takes into account our constrained financial situation and committed staff time.

Our next step for these actions is to complete short project briefs to clarify and describe in more detail the key milestones, what success looks like, how we will evaluate, who will deliver the project and what additional resources will be required. These will be signed off by the approving Senior Leadership Team member.

How we will operationalise our focus areas

We have developed a targeted set of actions that either build on or enhance work already underway or bring a University-wide approach to initiatives being trialled by individual units.

1. We will develop partnerships which will enable us to better understand and respond to the unique context of priority student groups including Māori as Te Tiriti partners, our diverse Pacific communities, and our disabled students.
 - We will pilot a co-ordinated system of early indicators to lift engagement, attendance and provide targeted support to those students most in need. This is a student-centric approach, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.
 - We will determine the reasons behind the equity gaps in achievement in our first-year core paper pass rates and develop interventions to address barriers to progression.
 - We will study successful support practices in Health Professional Programmes (e.g. Kōhatu and Va'a o Tautai) and look to expand successful practices to other divisions.
2. We will ensure all students have a seamless and user-friendly, learner-centric experience when navigating the University.
 - We will create a Student Journey Map to help understand the pathways of all learners. A focus on priority learner groups will help us to understand their unique contexts and requirements as they navigate the University and develop targeted interventions more accurately.
 - We will research and implement initiatives to increase student engagement, belonging and academic preparedness before their arrival at Otago.
 - In order to simplify choices for students and facilitate timely completion of their study, we will undertake a review of Programme Architecture in order to develop clear Degree Maps.
 - We will evaluate the Pathway programme and the new Level 5 Diploma programmes to understand the effect on student retention.

3. All students get the support they need by improving visibility, accessibility and uptake of holistic student supports.
 - Create a one-stop 'Student Life Centre' alongside in-person and online support services.
 - Develop an Otago Disability Action Plan.
 - Further develop and implement support services at all campuses that are appropriate and meet the obligations of the Pastoral Care Code.
 - Upskill teaching staff to better direct students to access support services via a new Pastoral Care Network.
 - Continue development of targeted financial support through scholarships and hardship funds.

How we will operationalise our enablers

We have identified three enablers which will help us to achieve our targeted focus actions. Culture, data and technology play a key role in improving the success of our learners.

1. To ensure all actions and initiatives are undertaken with the needs of the student at the centre, we will enhance our culture of learner success amongst our people.
 - Refresh the University Teaching and Learning Plan taking a student-centric approach, piloting a te ao Māori and Pacific and pedagogy approach.
 - Co-design a Student Space Strategy with Māori, Pacific, and disabled students and revise the Strategic Asset Management Plan in line with this strategy.
 - Appoint a DVC Māori to the Senior Leadership Team.
2. Effective use of data analytics for teaching, learning and support.
 - Invest in technology systems to enable a centralised collection of data and timely reporting as recommended in the Digital Learning Environment review.
 - Develop a user-friendly dashboard for staff and students to increase the visibility and accessibility of data.
3. Teaching and learning technology supports our students to succeed.
 - Ensure we have effective systems that enable us to co-ordinate timely service provision to students through wider use and development of the CRSM and other service software.
 - Invest in the digital teaching and learning environment, including review and upgrade of the Learning Management System.

Partnerships underpin and empower everything we do

Our understanding of students' context and the world they live in will be strengthened by meaningful, long term partnership with our diverse stakeholders and communities. We will be better equipped to serve our students as we work together with the communities around us in Otago, te Waipounamu, Aotearoa, the Pacific and the world.

University of Otago
Learner Success Plan Timeline 2023–2030

KEY:

Phase 1: Scope and research

Phase 2: Pilot, implement or complete where possible

Phase 3: Evaluate and continuous improvement

Focus areas		Actions	Responsible leaders	2023	2024	2025	to 2030
Understand and respond to the unique contexts of priority student groups: - Māori as Te Tiriti partners - Diverse Pacific communities - Disabled students	1	Pilot a co-ordinated system of early indicators to lift engagement, attendance and provide targeted support.	DVCA				
	2	Investigate equity gaps in first year core paper pass rates to better understand and address barriers to progression.	DVCA				
	3	Optimise mid-year progress interventions.	DVCA				
	4	Investigate successful support practices in Health Professional Programmes (e.g. Kōhatu and Va'a o Tautai) to expand successful practice to other divisions.	DVCA/DVCM				
A seamless and user-friendly learner-centric experience for navigating University	5	Create a Student Journey Map to understand requirements from student perspectives and develop interventions to improve transition and retention.	DVCA/DVC EE				
	6	Research and implement initiatives to increase engagement, belonging and academic preparedness before students arrive at Otago.	Dean L&T				
	7	Develop clear Degree Maps through a review of Programme Architecture.	Dean L&T				
	8	Evaluate the Pathway programme and the new Level 5 Diploma programmes to understand the effect on student retention.	DVCA				
All students get the support they need by improving visibility, accessibility and uptake of holistic student supports.	9	Create a one-stop 'Student Life Centre' alongside in-person and online support services.	DVCA				
	10	Develop an Otago Disability Action Plan.	Director SS				
	11	Develop and implement support services at all campuses that are appropriate and meet the obligations of the Pastoral Care Code.	Director SS				
	12	Upskill teaching staff to better direct students to access support services via a new Pastoral Care Network.	Director SS				
	13	Continue development of targeted financial support through Pūtea Tautoko hardship funds and scholarships.	VC				
Enablers		Actions	Responsible Leaders	2023	2024	2025	to 2030
An enhanced culture of learner success amongst our people	14	Refresh the University Teaching and Learning Plan taking a student-centric approach, piloting a te ao Māori and Pacific and pedagogy approach.	Dean L&T				
	15	Co-design a Student Space Strategy with Māori, Pacific, and disabled students and revise the Strategic Asset Management Plan in line with this strategy.	COO				
	16	Appoint a DVC Māori to Senior Leadership Team.	VC				
Effective use of data analytics for teaching, learning and support	17	Invest in technology systems to enable a centralised collection of data and timely reporting as recommended in the Digital Learning Environment review.	COO/DVCA				
	18	Develop a user-friendly dashboard for staff and students to increase visibility and accessibility of data.	COO/DVCA				
Teaching and learning technology supports our students to succeed	19	Ensure we have the best systems to coordinate timely service provision to students and provide visibility through wider use and development of the CRSM and other service software.	COO/DVCA				
	20	Invest in the digital teaching and learning environment, including review and upgrade of the Learning Management System.	COO/DVCA				