



Te Kokeka Whakamua – University of Otago Disability Action Plan: 2024–2027



University
of Otago

ŌTĀKOU WHAKAIHU WAKA

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Foreword



At the heart of The University of Otago – Ōtākou Whakaihu Waka lies a commitment to inclusivity and diversity. For decades, we have proudly championed the rights of disabled students, and we are recognised for our excellence in responding to the needs of disabled students. Te Kokeka Whakamua, our Disability Action Plan, inspires us to move forward with a purpose and reaffirm our aspiration to be at the forefront of disability inclusion in tertiary education.

Te Kokeka Whakamua is a testament to our values and a reflection of our dedication to creating an environment where every student feels confident, valued, empowered and supported to achieve their full potential. It is how we move towards a more inclusive and equitable tertiary experience.

Through Te Kokeka Whakamua, we commit to identify and implement best practices that will not only enhance the educational experience for disabled students but will also enrich our entire university community. By fostering an environment of manaakitaka, understanding and support, we

aim to remove barriers to access, participation and achievement, and ensure that every student has the opportunity to thrive.

As we move forward, we do so with a sense of pride in our teaching excellence and a firm belief in the transformative power of education. By upholding our reputation for excellence, we not only fulfil our mission as a tertiary institution but also empower and transform the lives of disabled students, enabling them to accomplish their goals and make meaningful contributions to society.

Together, we can strive towards a future in which disability is celebrated and recognised as an integral part of our collective identity, enriching our community. With Te Kokeka Whakamua as our guide, we are confident in our ability to create a more inclusive and equitable university for all.

Professor Stuart Brock
Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic)
Te Pou Koko (Mātauraka)

Introduction

Te Kokeka Whakamua – Disability Action Plan 2024–2027 demonstrates the University of Otago’s ongoing commitment to creating a barrier-free, inclusive and accessible environment to enable disabled students to achieve their full potential while at Otago.

As one of the first universities to establish a formalised disability support service, Otago has been a sector leader in Aotearoa New Zealand. We are committed to providing leadership that supports all our staff to implement the actions and achieve the ambitious goals contained in this plan.

The experiences of disabled students have been central to the development of this plan and we

are grateful for the time each student took to provide considered and insightful input. We also acknowledge the value of the Kia Ōrite Toolkit, developed in partnership with Achieve: The National Post Secondary Education Disability Network, and the Tertiary Education Commission as we have developed this plan.

Transformational change to remove barriers for disabled students will involve challenging some long-held ways of operating and will require a University-wide response. Through a Te Kokeka Whakamua Working Group, we will continue to work with our student and staff community to co-design and monitor the implementation of this plan, and ensure we continue to achieve the goals we have set.



Our responsibilities to disabled students

The Human Rights Commission and the Office of the Ombudsman provide clear guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of tertiary education providers: “reasonable accommodation removes barriers so disabled people can study and work, access information, use services and get where they want to go; just like everybody else.”¹

“Education is both a human right in itself and an indispensable means of realising other human rights.”²

New Zealand has ratified several international treaties that cover the right to education, including the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in

Education and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (Article 24). The Education Standards Act responds directly to the Human Rights Act 1993 by ensuring compliance with human rights standards for people with disabilities.

All students at Otago have access to a considerable network of services and practical supports that provide the best possible chance to thrive while studying. Disabled students are welcomed in all spaces and services – the Disability Information and Support office (DIS) and the Otago Disabled Students Association (ODSA) are resourced to respond specifically to the needs of disabled students.

¹ ombudsman.parliament.nz/sites/default/files/2023-01/summary_reasonable_accommodation_of_persons_with_disabilities_in_new_zealand.pdf

² tikatangata.org.nz/human-rights-in-aotearoa/right-to-education





Development of our 2024–2027 goals and actions

We took a student-centred approach to understanding where to focus our resources. Respecting the time students have already taken to provide feedback, we first analysed disabled student responses to the Student Support Services survey from 2019–2022. Using this rich data source, we compiled an initial list of barriers faced by students and potential goals and actions to address them. We then consulted with disabled student representatives, senior leaders in DIS and Student Services (as part of the Disability Action Plan Reference Group), the Learner Success Plan Governance Group, and sector experts.

Once a meaningful set of goals and a focused list

of actions were developed, we consulted more widely with disabled students and with academic and professional staff via an online survey. Feedback indicated that we had selected the most important areas to focus on. However, we revised some details based on the valuable feedback received.

Lastly, we held two focus groups with disabled students to gain their perspectives on the final plan, and again collected feedback from students and staff via a second online survey. We are grateful to all the students and staff who shared their experiences and expertise in the development of this plan; those contributions will enhance the impact the plan will create in the coming years.

Barriers identified by disabled students

Through consultation with students and staff, and a review of over 550 responses from disabled students in the Student Support Services survey (2019–2022), the most common barriers for disabled students were identified and have been summarised in the table below.

Table 1. Barriers to academic success as identified by students

Barriers	Some examples identified by students
Technology	An inconsistent approach to the release of lecture recordings and closed captioning.
Attitudes	Poor response from some teaching staff to disability disclosures and inconsistent information provided on support available through DIS. Limited disability training among student facing staff.
Policy and processes	Costs and wait times for required documentation to access support, often needed from specialist health services. Challenges accessing and understanding policies relating to alternate arrangements and special considerations.
Information and communication	Frequently repeating details of their disability to various staff before finding the right support. Lack of captions on marketing videos and accessibility tool on our website.
Campus environment	Lack of designated quiet and low sensory spaces for study.

The goals we have set for Otago

There are many examples where Otago has led the way in providing comprehensive and exemplary support to enable disabled students to thrive and achieve while at university. We are proud that both our staff and students hold national leadership roles including with Achieve and the National Disabled Students' Association.

The focus of Te Kokeka Whakamua has been to develop a targeted set of actions that we will both measure and monitor. These sit under the umbrella of five broad goals, as outlined below, and are explained in more detail in the final section of this plan.

- Goal one:** Our teaching and campus environment is inclusive and accessible
- Goal two:** Create a barrier-free learning environment for information, communication and physical access
- Goal three:** Enhance our holistic, student-centred approach to supporting disabled students
- Goal four:** Respond to changing needs through innovation and leadership
- Goal five:** Improve support for disabled staff



Defining disability at Otago

The New Zealand Disability Strategy states that from the perspective of disabled people “disability is something that happens when people with impairments face barriers in society; it is society that disables us, not our impairments, this is the thing all disabled people have in common. It is something that happens when the world we live in has been designed by people who assume that everyone is the same.”³

We adopt the language convention in the New Zealand Disability Strategy and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (the Convention) to acknowledge that attitudinal

and environmental barriers disable a person, rather than the limitations being within the individual themselves. We use the term “disabled students” to enhance mana, pride and confidence among our disabled learners. Disabled people are diverse, and not everyone will choose to use this language. Some may prefer the term “students with disabilities” or no label at all. We respect the right of people to self-determine their personal terminology.

The Otago DIS team works with students who have disabilities, impairments, medical conditions or injuries that may affect their ability to participate in university activities on an equal basis.

³ odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/about-the-strategy/new-zealand-disability-strategy-2016-2026/the-new-disability-strategy-download-in-a-range-of-accessible-formats/new-zealand-disability-strategy-read-online/who-we-are-our-community/#:~:text=Disability%20is%20something%20that%20happens,that%20everyone%20is%20the%20same

Disabled students at Otago

In 2023, over 10 per cent of the University of Otago student population (2,256 students) declared a disability that impacts their ability to study. This number has been tracking upwards over time. We acknowledge that many students don't declare their disability, or have a disability that does not impact on their study to the extent that they feel a need to

declare it.

Challenges with mental health impacting study have been increasing, particularly since 2020, and it is now the most prevalent impairment. This is followed by learning impairments such as dyslexia and ADHD. These two impairments make up just under half of the students supported through DIS.

Table 2. Percentage of impairments among disabled students at Otago in 2023

Impairment	Percentage of disabled student population
Mental health	24%
Learning	22%
Medical	16%
Temporary	7%
Mobility	5%
Head injury	5%
Hearing, vision, speech	3%
Other	18%

The future we aspire to achieve

We aspire for all students to reach their full potential while studying at the University of Otago, and are committed to implementing the necessary policy, training and operating procedures to ensure we create a barrier-free environment.



Key performance indicators for disabled students at Otago

We set our key performance indicators for disabled students in our Learner Success Plan. We aspire to achieve parity with the general student population. These targets are the same for Māori and Pacific students.

Table 3. Disabled student indicators, current success rates and 2030 targets

Indicators	Current success rate	Target by 2030*
Raise first-year undergraduate student paper pass rate for disabled students	83%	87%
Raise first-year undergraduate student retention rates for disabled students	84%	85%
Raise qualification completion rate for disabled students	69%	76%
Disabled students report a strong sense of belonging to the University community	68%	80%

*The 2030 targets are achieving parity with the general student population

To achieve these targets, we will support the DIS vision and work in partnership across the University, including with ODSA, 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 office

The DIS philosophy is to provide appropriate learning support to enable students to successfully study as independently as possible. DIS also promotes the development of an environment that is physically and attitudinally inclusive of the needs of students with impairments.

The University of Otago was one of the first universities in New Zealand to recognise that some students with impairments would require additional support to study successfully at the tertiary level. We put this support in place before disabled people were protected under the Humans Rights Act, and have now developed a comprehensive and professional support service for disabled students.

“The staff at the disability centre have always been very supportive and kind. They have ensured I’ve had

all the resources that I needed to succeed and made sure I knew what was available to me. The centre also supported me in my first year of post grad, which helped me to achieve good grades that allowed me to continue with further postgraduate studies.”

Disabled student response in Student Satisfaction Survey, 2022

Over 90 per cent of respondents to the Student Satisfaction Survey in 2023 report being satisfied with the services provided by DIS.

“I felt supported, and it made it possible for me to successfully sit my exams without pain.”

Disabled student response to Student Support Services Survey, 2022





The key roles of DIS are to:

- Provide quality specialist support services that enable disabled students to reach their educational goals and develop their full potential.
- Ensure students with impairments have access to the full university experience.
- Foster an inclusive and accessible environment in which peoples' differences and differing needs in relation to disability are understood, accepted and valued.
- Assist and encourage teaching staff in the delivery of teaching support to students with impairments, and act as a resource for university staff and students in relation to disability issues.

The recent review of DIS noted the productive co-ordination between their services, Te Huka Mātauraka and the Pacific Islands Centre, and the commitment of the DIS team to actively engage in training that enables integration of te ao Māori, tikanga Māori, te reo and Mātauranga Māori.

“I really appreciate the help provided [by] the Māori centre and that along with the disability support have kept me at university and helped me all the way through.”

Disabled student response to Student Support Services Survey, 2019

“Te Huka Mātauraka is such a needed support for our taura Māori. They are super supportive, advocate for students all the time and are always ready to help when needed. I could not be here without their support!”

Disabled student response to Student Support Services Survey, 2022



Otago Disabled Students' Association

Otago Disabled Students' Association (ODSA) is a whānau made up of taura from both the University of Otago and Te Pūkenga Otago Polytechnic. Members may identify as a disabled or impaired student themselves, or be an ally of the disabled community.

ODSA's pūmanawa (what makes their heart beat) is empowering the voice of disabled students through inclusivity, accessibility, advocacy and allyship on campus in Ōtepoti and in greater Aotearoa. Their mahi is reflected in this whakatauki.

*Kei tēnā tangata, kei tēnā tangata tōna ake āhua,
tōna ake mauri, tōna ake mana anō hoki.*

Each and every one has their own uniqueness, life essence and presence.

ODSA advocate for the disabled student community on committees, through submissions, and via radio and other media. They host guest speakers, organise movie screenings, collect data and survey responses from students, and host regular 'DisabiliTea' gatherings for disabled students.

ODSA has been awarded the Sustainability Office's top award, Kōwhai, for two years running. ODSA was recognised for "massive efforts" to embed sustainable practices, providing information about what sustainability could look like through a disability lens and undertaking a wide range of actions to achieve this goal.

Universal Design principles

Universal Design principles⁴ are referenced throughout this plan to guide the development and modification of our policies and practices. Universal Design principles provide a framework to ensure we create teaching and learning environments that are usable by all students without the need for additional requests modification.

One example that has been the focus of a lot of research is availability of lecture recordings. Our own consultation and survey results indicate that a lack of a universal approach to the release of lecture recordings is a common barrier to student success and an

avoidable additional burden to disabled students.

We are committed to working with academic staff to design a research and evidence informed approach that will enable a consistent policy for releasing lectures. We look forward to using Universal Design principles, along with input from our student community and the latest research, to co-design a new policy for Otago as a matter of priority.

We believe this action plan will address the significant barriers and issues to enable disabled students to fulfil their potential while studying at the University of Otago.

⁴ universaldesign.ie/about-universal-design/the-7-principles



University of Otago strategic context Vision 2040

Our people and knowledge transforming lives, connecting communities, and nurturing the environment in Otago, Te Waipounamu, Aotearoa, the Pacific and the world is the vision we are working towards achieving by 2040.

This vision guides and informs our collective and individual actions including our work on Te Kokeka Whakamua.

Whakamana Pae Tata

Pae Tata is our near horizon strategic plan that will guide us to 2030. Within this plan there are five domains. Te Kokeka Whakamua is situated within the “Provide compelling and viable educational offerings that deliver excellent student outcomes and experiences” domain. Te Kokeka Whakamua also links into “Whakamana i Te Tiriti o Waitangi” and “Support our people to achieve their best” domains.

Te Ara Akitu – Learner Success Plan

Our vision for learner success is articulated in Te Ara Akitu, our recently published Learner Success Plan, in which disabled students are described as a priority group. Our vision is that “learners from all backgrounds and experiences are supported holistically to reach their full potential and grow to become innovative global citizens.”

Te Kokeka Whakamua is an output of Te Ara Akitu and builds on extensive work to develop support for disabled students already in place at the University of Otago. We will deliver our aspirations for disabled students, and monitor and report on progress through the lens of the Learner Success Framework and established governance and reporting structures.

University of Otago frameworks

In addition to Te Ara Akitu, several existing University frameworks inform the creation of Te Kokeka Whakamua. The following frameworks are of particular importance:

- *Māori Strategic Framework 2022*

Specifically, the following goals:

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

- *Pacific Strategic Framework 2022–2030*

Specifically, the following goal and responses:

- 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*

Specifically, the following principles:

- 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 will continue to work in partnership with teams leading the above frameworks to co-design shared outcomes and reporting requirements.

In addition, the University of Otago is a signatory to the Education (Pastoral Care of Tertiary and International Learners) Code of Practice 2021, which outlines the government's expectations for the safety and wellbeing of tertiary students. Our support services for disabled students are governed by this code and will help ensure we continue to meet and exceed sector best practice.

Implementation, governance and reporting

Te Kokeka Whakamua aligns with Te Ara Akitu, our Learner Success Plan, and will be monitored by the Learner Success Governance Group who are responsible for reporting progress to the Senior Leadership Team, Senate, the University Council and the Tertiary Education Commission. Te Ara Akitu – Learner Success Governance Group meets every two months.

A Te Kokeka Whakamua Working Group will lead the implementation of the actions contained in this plan. This will be led by the Senior Advisor, Learner Success Plan with oversight from the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic and Te Ara Akitu, the Learner Success Plan Governance Group. We will co-design the implementation phase with disabled students to ensure good outcomes are delivered. We will ensure this work is integrated with existing University networks, including the newly established Learning and Teaching Network to ensure broad impact of the outcomes.

Our plan to increase learner success outcomes for disabled students 2024–2027

This action plan builds on the significant work of our staff and students to remove barriers for disabled students. The actions listed below will continue to ensure we are responsive to the needs of our students and staff. The Senior Leadership Team sponsor for this programme of work is the Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Academic.

Goal one: Our teaching and campus environment is inclusive and accessible

Actions	Responsible leader	Evidence of progress	Delivered in Pae Tata horizon
<p>1. Embed Universal Design principles in teaching, procurement and marketing practices where this will improve student engagement and achievement. A future focus on including services in te reo Māori and New Zealand Sign Language is needed.</p> <p>Some examples include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Increased use of closed captions and Otago Capture Auto transcription service. - Availability of lecture recordings. - Ensuring all marketing videos are captioned and website images are labelled. - Ensuring the review of our Learning Management System addresses accessibility gaps. 	<p>Dean of Learning and Teaching</p>	<p>Professional development opportunities will be available to staff.</p> <p>Departments report on their initiatives to embed Universal Design principles in their practices, and students report that digital and built infrastructure is more accessible through student surveys.</p> <p>Universal Design principles are used as a criteria for procurement, including software procurement.</p>	<p>One (2024–2025)</p>

Actions	Responsible leader	Evidence of progress	Delivered in Pae Tata horizon
<p>2. Prepare a co-ordinated space strategy incorporating the diverse needs of the University disabled community to address needs in our physical environment. The strategy will be informed by our Campus Design for Access and Mobility Policy and delivered through the Accessibility Committee.</p> <p>Areas for improvement noted by students include way-finding, suitable student-centred study spaces and noise level indications on library floors.</p>	<p>Director, Property Services and Campus Development</p>	<p>Strategic direction is provided to the established Accessibility Committee responsive work programme.</p>	<p>Three (2026–2027)</p>

Goal two: Create a barrier-free learning environment for information, communication and physical access

Actions	Responsible leader	Evidence of progress	Delivered in Pae Tata horizon
<p>3. Review relevant policies and procedures to ensure they actively and intentionally remove barriers to learning and student success for disabled students at all Otago campuses and colleges, and follow Universal Design principles.</p> <p>Our initial focus will be on reviewing the following learning support policies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Special Consideration policy. - Lecture Recordings policy. - Alternative Arrangements policy. - Withdrawal under exceptional circumstances. - Evidence requirements for ongoing impairments policy, including the length of time a medical certificate is valid. - Student Academic Misconduct Procedures. 	<p>Co-sponsored with OUSA and DVC, Academic</p>	<p>Most impactful barriers identified. Policies, procedures and guidelines reviewed, published and implemented.</p>	<p>Two (2025–2026)</p>

Actions	Responsible leader	Evidence of progress	Delivered in Pae Tata horizon
<p>4. Continue to assess feasibility and implementation of new and emerging assistive technologies. This will complement existing supports we have already made available to all students, including Text Help and Grammarly.</p>	<p>Manager, Disability Information and Support</p>	<p>Form a working group to test and make recommendations on emerging opportunities. Training to help students make the best use of the technologies is made available.</p>	<p>Two (2025–2026)</p>
<p>5. Review communications to current and future students to ensure they are consistent and accessible.</p>	<p>Director, Communications</p>	<p>Provide training on Universal Design principles. Undertake an audit of communications and respond to any findings.</p>	<p>One (2024–2025)</p>

Goal three: Enhance our holistic, student-centred approach to supporting disabled students

Actions	Responsible leader	Evidence of progress	Delivered in Pae Tata horizon
<p>6. Improve staff capability and confidence through increased uptake of Achieve Disability Confidence 101 training.</p>	<p>Head of Organisational Development</p>	<p>Disability Confidence 101 training is included in relevant HR training programmes, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Student facing staff. - College staff (including Residential Assistants). - Marketing staff. - New staff induction. <p>Establish a target for all staff to complete Disability Confidence 101 training.</p>	<p>One (2024–2025)</p>

Actions	Responsible leader	Evidence of progress	Delivered in Pae Tata horizon
<p>7. Adopt simple systems and a universal gateway to support a “no-wrong-door” approach, whereby all staff receive training and support to provide seamless and consistent support to disabled students.</p>	<p>Director, Student Services</p>	<p>A reduction in the number of students reporting challenges in gaining the right advice and support.</p> <p>Actively nurture and equip the existing network of departmental disability contacts to support and influence their departments.</p> <p>Development of the Student Life Centre as outlined in Te Ara Akitu is critical to supporting this approach.</p> <p>Key measurement tool: Disabled students report increased sense of belonging through the Student Support Services Survey.</p>	<p>Two (2025–2026)</p>
<p>8. Ensure the student complaints process is student-centred, is responded to in an accessible way and is appropriately monitored.</p>	<p>Director, Student Services</p>	<p>Complaints process reviewed and necessary improvements made.</p>	<p>Three (2026–2027)</p>

Goal four: Respond to changing needs through innovation and leadership

Actions	Responsible leader	Evidence of progress	Delivered in Pae Tata horizon
<p>9. Facilitate a cross-sector approach to applied and experiential research with disabled students on their experience in tertiary education to create a responsive work plan.</p> <p>Research topics could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Understanding the experience of diverse communities of disabled taurira Māori. - Understanding the experience of diverse communities of disabled Pacific students. - Understanding impacts on learner success of the diverse impairments in our student community, for example, neurodiversity and mental health impairments. 	<p>Manager, Disability Information and Support</p>	<p>Relevant funding is sought through internal and external educational research funding programmes.</p> <p>Research is shared at relevant symposium.</p> <p>Work with TEC and Universities New Zealand to co-ordinate progress.</p>	<p>Three (2026–2027)</p>

Goal five: Improve support for disabled staff

Actions	Responsible leader	Evidence of progress	Delivered in Pae Tata horizon
<p>10. Review policies and practices to ensure disabled staff are appropriately supported.</p>	<p>Director, Human Resources</p>	<p>Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Framework actions are implemented.</p> <p>Measured and monitored through the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Governance Group.</p>	<p>Two (2025–2026)</p>





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of Otago

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