



Disability action plan



WAIHANGA ARA RAU

**Construction and
Infrastructure**

Workforce Development Council

Introduction



Everyone benefits when our workplaces, educational spaces, and communities are inclusive.

This Disability Action Plan was developed to support all people working in or with the Construction and Infrastructure (C&I) industries, to help us work together to improve the industries for everyone.

Purposely created as one plan for all, this plan is transparent, aims to encourage collaboration, and to emphasise the importance of everyone playing their part in improving disability inclusion in Construction and Infrastructure.

This Plan can be used by any organisation working in or with the Construction and Infrastructure sector.

Acknowledgements

Nothing About Us Without Us

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1.0 Context



This section covers disability definitions and models, the purpose of Waihanga Ara Rau, and our rationale for developing a Disability Action Plan.

1.1 Terminology - what does disability mean?

In this Disability Action Plan, we use the phrase 'disabled people' to emphasise that people with impairments are disabled by their environment, rather than being 'disabled' themselves (Office for Disability Issues, 2016). This framing of disability as a socio-political problem rather than an individual one is known as the Social Model of Disability (Enabling Good Lives, 2022). The social model of disability approach underpins the New Zealand Disability Strategy mentioned above, and helps drive its focus on ensuring all environments, across all facets of social and civil life, are inclusive and accessible to disabled people.

This approach is opposite to the outdated medical model of disability, which states that disability lies with the individual, who needs to 'adapt' or be 'cured' to fit society. Rather, the social model puts the responsibility for supporting inclusion and accessibility onto non-disabled people and all organisations.

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#) defines an impairment as "any long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder the full and effective participation of disabled people in society on an equal basis with others".

An impairment can result from accidents, injuries, congenital conditions, genetics, long-term conditions, and health issues, and anyone could become disabled at any time. Depending on the impairment, it may not cause an individual significant issues, but when an impairment comes into play in a society built one way, for one type of person, it can be disabling. It is important to note that disabilities can be hidden (e.g. chronic health, mental health, learning, communication). Disability can be experienced for a period or over a lifetime. It may also evolve and change for individuals.

We recognise that there will be some disabled people who will not be comfortable with the use of the term 'disabled people' and would prefer 'people with disability' or nothing at all. Language is important, and we both respect and accommodate these preferences, incorporating them into our actions.

It is also critical to acknowledge cultural considerations in relation to disability. Impairments and being disabled are viewed differently across different cultures.

1.2 Intersectionality

The experience of disability is influenced by a person's impairment and other demographics, such as gender, age, sexuality, and ethnicity. This intersectionality can have a compounding effect on an individual's experience of disability.

We recognise that disabled people belong to different groups, have a wide range of health conditions, and live in a variety of contexts (Earle, 2019). They are Māori, Pacific and/or Pākehā, or from one of Aotearoa New Zealand's many other ethnic, cultural, and linguistic groups; they are part of LGBTQIA+, rainbow and takatāpui communities, they are migrants, at-risk youth and older people.¹

We have been guided by Whaikaha - the Ministry of Disabled People² and use the terms disabled people and tāngata whaikaha Māori in our organisations.³ Similarly, we have followed the practice of the Ministry of Health (2023) in our use of the term 'disabled Pacific peoples' to describe disabled people from Pacific communities. Please note that the term 'disabled people' includes tāngata whaikaha Māori and disabled Pacific peoples where the latter are not specifically referenced.

There are many impairments which can lead to people experiencing disability, and outcomes for people in different impairment cohorts vary greatly. While general data on disabled people's education and employment outcomes is poor, it is known that people who experience significant cognitive impairments have very poor outcomes in both education and employment. It is important that work aiming to improve outcomes for disabled people takes disparities between disabled people into consideration and aims to target those groups who are most disadvantaged.

1.3 Upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi

To demonstrate our commitment to Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, we have aligned the Disability Action Plan with several of the Enabling Good Lives Principles:⁴

- Tino Rangatiratanga (self-determination)
- Building relationships
- Mana-enhancing

This means honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi, in a practical sense, by working in partnership with Tangata Whaikaha Māori to improve the Construction and Infrastructure industries by Māori, for Māori. Through this partnership, we will meaningfully contribute to meeting the needs and aspirations of Tangata Whaikaha Māori and their whānau, learners, businesses, hapū and iwi. This approach meets our obligation to support Māori Crown relations for the benefit of our core purpose: to provide industry with a strong voice in order to develop a sustainable and highly skilled workforce.

1 Office for Disability Issues, 2016

2 <https://www.whaikaha.govt.nz/>

3 Disabled People and Tāngata Whaikaha Māori, personal communication, September 22, 2023.

4 <https://www.enablinggoodlives.co.nz/about-egl/egl-approach/principles/>

1.4 Waihanga Ara Rau purpose

Waihanga Ara Rau Workforce Development Council facilitates the voices of the following industries:

- Access trades
- Civil infrastructure
- Electricity supply
- Electrotechnology
- Finishing Trades
- Gas supply
- Offsite construction
- Onsite construction
- Plumbing, gasfitting, drainlaying
- Professional services
- Water services

We work with industry to understand the skills that are needed in these industries. We lead the development of industry qualifications, set industry standards, and quality assure training provision against these industry standards.

In addition to engaging with industry and employers, we work collaboratively across the vocational education sector. We engage with the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) to support and improve outcomes for all learners in our industries.

1.5 Rationale for developing a Disability Action Plan

Waihanga Ara Rau is required under the Education (Construction and Infrastructure Workforce Development Council) Order in Council 2021 (the OiC), to act in a manner that –

7. 1) b - seeks to contribute to a vocational education and training system that provides opportunities for all people to reach their full potential and capabilities in the construction and infrastructure industries, including those who have been traditionally underserved by the education system

7. 1) c - ensures the construction and infrastructure vocational education and training system provides opportunities for all people in the construction and infrastructure workforce to reach their full potential

7. 1) e - seeks to contribute to an education system that helps ensure fair and equitable outcomes for all

The Objective in Council direction to give effect to the Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) requires Waihanga Ara Rau to act to support TES objectives. The most relevant for this work are:

Objective 2: Barrier-free access: Priority 3: Reduce barriers to education for all, including for Māori and Pacific learners / ākonga, disabled learners / ākonga and those with learning support needs. AND

Objective 4: Future of learning and work: Priority 7: Collaborate with industries and employers to ensure learners / ākonga have the skills, knowledge and pathways to succeed in work.

In addition to the direction provided by the Objective in Council and the Tertiary Education Strategy, Waihanga Ara Rau must, under the Employment Relations Act 2000 (S104 and 105), and the Human Rights Act 1993, act as a fair and accommodating employer of disabled people.

1.6 New Zealand Disability Strategy 2016 - 2026

New Zealand's key disability focused document, which is designed to guide the work of government agencies on disability issues from 2016 to 2026. The Strategy has three sets of principles, and two approaches underlying its focus.

The three principles are: Te Tiriti o Waitangi, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, and ensuring disabled people are involved in decision-making that impacts them.

The two approaches are: investing in our whole lives – a long-term approach, and specific and mainstream services – a twin-track approach.

Outcomes under the Strategy, which particularly guide our work, are Outcome 1: Education (especially the need for disabled people to be involved in the development of educational opportunities), and Outcome 2: Employment (especially proportional representation as employees).

The creation of a Disability Action Plan for Waihangara Rau provides a mechanism for the organisation to describe the actions it is taking to give effect to the direction of the Order in Council and Tertiary Education Strategy, comply with relevant legislation, and support an equitable society.



1.7 Disability data

- **17%** of people living in New Zealand households were disabled. This equated to 851,000 people, of whom 753,000 were adults.
- Females were more likely to be disabled than males, at **18%** and **15%** respectively.
- Disability rates differed by ethnic group. Māori had a disability rate of **21%**, Pacific people **16%**, and Asian people **9%** (2023).
- The employment rate for disabled people was **39.8%**, compared with 80.3% for non-disabled people.
- The unemployment rate for disabled people was **11%**, compared with **4.5%** for non-disabled people.
- **26%** of disabled people were underutilised compared to **10%** of non-disabled people.⁵
- Disabled people were less likely to report satisfaction with career development opportunities (**45%**), compared to non-disabled (**53%**) (2021).
- Tāngata whaikaha Māori⁶ were less likely to have a paid job (at **40%**, compared to **71%** of Māori non-disabled) (2021).
- For adults, **physical limitations** were the most commonly experienced impairment, and these were more common with age.

Younger people and learners

- Eleven percent (**11%**) of children aged under 15 years are disabled. There is a higher rate of disability amongst Māori, at **14%** (2021). This has significant implications for the future workforce.
- Disabled learners are poorly identified⁷ in education data. There is no systematic monitoring for this priority group to understand how well expectations for inclusive, quality education is being met.⁸
- Disabled learners in tertiary education report significant challenges.
 - Thirty two percent (**32%**)⁹ of survey respondents said it was difficult or impossible to ask teaching staff for help.
 - Twenty percent (**20%**) said their learning environment was difficult to access.¹⁰
- Accessibility and support are key themes that disabled learners want improvement in.¹¹

⁵ Underutilisation is a Stats NZ term. Underutilisation rate reflects people who do not have a job, but are available to work and are actively seeking employment

⁶ Tāngata Whaikaha Māori is a recent term to refer to Māori disabled people. Tāngata Whaikaha refers to the determination and ability of Māori disabled people, where whaikaha means to have strength, to have ability and to be enabled. Another term for Māori disabled people is Whānau hauā – which acknowledges that the experience of disability is a collective whanau experience.

⁷ They are not identified at all in data covering compulsory education. Data held at the tertiary level is not considered to be robust and does not cover the whole sector.

⁸ Education Review Office, 2022

^{9, 10, 11} National Disabled Students' Association (NDSA) 2024

1.8 Disability-confident organisations



Employment New Zealand outlines that a disability-confident organisation:

- has managers and staff who understand disability and know what people with disability can do
- has managers who know it is important to their organisation to employ people with disability
- has in place inclusive policies and practices
- has plans in place to ensure a diverse workplace
- addresses barriers to employment and promotion for people with disability
- thinks about the needs of people with disability when designing products and services
- thinks about the needs of people with disability when hiring staff
- can attract a wider pool of job applicants
- is more likely to retain talented employees with disability.



Disability confidence helps organisations to:

- get and keep good staff
- build better individual relationships with all stakeholders, including customers
- utilise the benefits of a diverse workforce such as increased innovation
- manage costs. Recruitment costs are lower, disabled people have fewer ACC incidents and accidents at work in comparison to other employees
- ensure the workforce reflects a diverse community.

2.0 Overarching areas of focus

This section explores the four overarching areas of focus in this Disability Action Plan, drawing from the collective points above.

1. Industry capability (building industry)
2. Responsive qualifications (building training providers)
3. Organisational capability (building our people)
4. Wider community (building disabled communities)



2.1 Industry capability

Disabled people are able to learn and work, and show their true potential in the Construction and Infrastructure industries.

What we want to achieve	What success looks like	We will measure this by	What we will do
2.1a. Construction and Infrastructure industries can quickly and easily access information that enables employers and colleagues to provide effective support that allows disabled staff to show their full potential, including information specifically about tangata whaikaha Māori and disabled Pacific People.	2.1b. Disabled people are able to learn and work, and show their true potential in the Construction and Infrastructure industries. Qualifications and standards are flexible and accessible to learners, as well as delivered in a flexible and accessible way by training providers.	2.1c. Usage of advice provided: # of unique visits to the webpage, # of downloads from the webpage. 2.1d. Strategic Reference Group (SRG) members report a positive impact on information and advice shared with them, including related to tangata whaikaha Māori and disabled Pacific People.	2.1e. Create and promote advice and resources to build industry capability, including specifically about tangata whaikaha Māori and disabled Pacific People. 2.1f. Share resources directly with SRG members, associations, providers, and businesses. 2.1g. Provide data on disabled learners retention rates across the C&I sector, and drill down on tangata whaikaha Māori and Pacific disabled learners.



2.2 Responsive qualifications

Qualifications and standards are flexible and accessible to learners, and are delivered in a flexible and accessible manner by training providers through the use of Universal Design for Learning.

What we want to achieve	What success looks like	We will measure this by	What we will do
<p>2.2a. Across all qualifications work, we ensure accessibility and flexibility are part of all design and process, by using Universal Design for Learning.</p> <p>2.2b. Tertiary providers and trainers who deliver training have easy and reliable access to best practice advice on supporting disabled learners, especially with pastoral care, including for tangata whaikaha Māori and disabled Pacific learners.</p>	<p>1b. Disabled people are able to learn and work, and show their true potential in the Construction and Infrastructure industries.</p> <p>Qualifications and standards are flexible and accessible to learners, as well as delivered in a flexible and accessible way by training providers.</p>	<p>2.2d. Feedback from providers, trainers, and learners.</p> <p>2.2e. Training providers have completed disability capability training 101.</p> <p>2.2f. Training providers have completed Universal Design for Learning training.</p>	<p>2.2g. Work closely with qualification designers and training providers to support accessibility and flexible qualifications and delivery.</p>



2.3 Organisational capability

Waihanga Ara Rau Council, Senior Leadership Team, and people leaders have a responsibility to improve our disability confidence and competence through building our organisational capability. This influence and progress will change kaimahi attitudes, which will change the way we do business as usual by ensuring we have an 'equal by design' approach to our work.

Creating a diverse workplace that is welcoming to a diverse community will also support diversity of thought across our work and widen our talent pool. This will also support our external mandate to be an equitable employer, as outlined in the New Zealand Disability Strategy.

Waihanga Ara Rau currently lacks understanding of how disabled kaimahi experience the organisation, and the overall level of disability confidence and capability across all kaimahi.

If our organisation is like others, it is likely that:

- Disabled kaimahi would like more access and easier access to assistive technologies and adaptive office equipment.
- More accessible bathrooms, kitchens, quieter breakout spaces and a more welcoming office space (e.g. ability to adjust lighting and noise)
- People leaders may need more support to manage and empower disabled kaimahi, and ensure management of working terms and conditions is equitable
- Disabled kaimahi may experience ableist attitudes and be reluctant to disclose a disability.

What we want to achieve	What success looks like	We will measure this by	What we will do
2.3a. An organisation which is disability confident and capable, where disabled kaimahi thrive, tangata whaikaha Māori, and disabled Pacific People thrive.	2.3b. The disabled kaimahi experience at Waihanga Ara Rau is one of inclusivity, comfort, equity, and empowerment.	2.3c. % of kaimahi who have completed disability capability training. 2.3d. % of kaimahi who agree we are an inclusive employer. 2.3e. % of Māori kaimahi who agree we are an inclusive employer. 2.3f. % of Pacific kaimahi who agree we are an inclusive employer.	2.3g. Build disability capability, including from a te ao Māori and Pacific lens, for all kaimahi. 2.3h. Ask all kaimahi about their experiences working at Waihanga Ara Rau. 2.3i. Promote and provide access to guidance, advice, insights, and research. 2.3j. Report on workplace examples of excellence.

2.4 The wider community

Disability communities, including tangata whaikaha Māori and Pacific disabled people, have strong, trusted relationships with Waihangara Ara Rau.

What we want to achieve	What success looks like	We will measure this by	What we will do
2.4a. For Waihangara Ara Rau to be experienced by disability communities (including tangata whaikaha Māori communities and disabled Pacific communities) as an accessible, inclusive organisation which actively partners with disabled people to improve education and employment outcomes.	<div>2.4b. Disability communities, including tangata whaikaha Māori and Pacific disabled people have strong, trusted relationships with Waihangara Ara Rau.</div> <div>2.4c. Disability communities report experiencing the organisation as inclusive and accessible.</div> <div>2.4d. We are viewed by disability communities as a genuine partner in improving outcomes for disabled people.</div>	2.4e. Feedback from our advisory group and disability organisations we have worked with.	<div>2.4f. Include disabled communities and voice in all we do.</div> <div>2.4g. Use our influence to support others to include disabled voice in all they do.</div> <div>2.4h. Partner with disability organisations to support and promote our organisations.</div>



References

Waihanga Ara Rau and Hanga-Aro-Rau Workforce Development Councils. Let's level up: Unlock the power of inclusivity and discover the potential of the disabled workforce. Key findings. November 2024.

Office of the Ombudsman. (2021). Making disability rights real 2014 to 2019. <https://www.ombudsman.parliament.nz/sites/default/files/2021-11/Making%20Disability%20Rights%20Real%202014%20to%202019.pdf>

Whaikaha Ministry of Disabled People. Pacific Community Talanoa Feedback Report. September 2024.

Guidance

Although limited, there are several sources that tell us about the current state for disabled learners and adults, and provides guidance for the sector:

Stats NZ undertook a disability census in 2023. Information includes demographics, education, employment of disabled people. Household Disability Survey 2023 – findings, definitions, and design summary | Stats NZ

Whaikaha have a range of data and information (mainly based on Stats NZ census/research). Data is categorised across the eight New Zealand Disability Strategy outcomes, including employment, education and leadership. It has also produced data on how Tāngata whaikaha Māori (Māori Disabled) are doing since 2018 via Te Kupenga survey. <https://www.odi.govt.nz/nz-disability-strategy/> <https://www.odi.govt.nz/guidance-and-resources/tangata-whaikaha-maori-data/>

Education Review Office (ERO) in partnership with the Human Rights Commission (HRC) and the Office for Disability Issues (ODI), looked at how well the education system is supporting disabled learners in schools. <https://ero.govt.nz/our-research/thriving-at-school-education-for-disabled-learners-in-schools>

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) <https://ncea.education.govt.nz/universal-design-learning-udl>

The Statement of National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP) and Tertiary Education Strategy (TES). <https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/NELP-TES-documents/FULL-NELP-2020.pdf>

National Disabled Learners Association, MoE, TEC, and NZQA worked on the Lets' Get Accessible research project to understand disabled learners' experiences navigating the tertiary education system. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/publications/tertiary_education/education-learners/lets-get-accessible-disabled-learners-experiences-navigating-the-tertiary-education-system

Te Pūkenga Te Rito Research into the experience of disabled learners in the vocational system. August 2021. <https://www.xn--tepkenga-szb.ac.nz/assets/Our-Pathway/Learner-Journey/Te-Rito-Insights-from-Disabled-learners-Part-Three1.pdf>

Kia Ōrite Toolkit provides current, New Zealand-specific guidance to help tertiary education organisations better support disabled learners. <https://www.achieve.org.nz/kia-orite-toolkit/>