

# **The Kia Ōrite Toolkit - a New Zealand code of practice to achieve an inclusive and equitable tertiary education environment for disabled learners**

## **Executive summary**

**He aha te mea nui o te ao?**

**He tangata, he tangata, he tangata.**

**What is the most important thing in the world?**

**It is people, it is people, it is people.**

**The Kia Ōrite Toolkit provides current, New Zealand-specific guidance to help tertiary education organisations better support disabled learners.**

As a New Zealand code of practice, it is designed to achieve an inclusive and equitable tertiary learning environment for disabled learners to succeed. The toolkit will help all tertiary education organisations' (TEOs) staff to become more disability confident, and for managers and the wider organisation to take responsibility for implementing the toolkit's best practices. The toolkit will also support development of Disability Action Plans at TEOs.

Disabled learners are one of the most educationally disadvantaged groups within New Zealand. Learning environments designed only for non-disabled students create barriers for academically capable disabled learners. These disabling learning environments are created by social expectations and assumptions of ableism, as well as inadequate infrastructure. The social model of disability exposes the reality that it is people who are responsible for dominant assumptions and practices. Therefore, it is people who must dismantle disabling environments.

The Government recognises that New Zealand's economic growth and improved social outcomes depend on equal access and equal opportunities for all learners, including disabled people.

A fully inclusive tertiary education system recognises and values diversity, including disabled learners, and is fundamental to the ongoing sustainability of tertiary education. Disabled learners have the same right to education and to realise their potential as non-disabled people, and are increasingly seen as a priority group.

Disabled people may complain to the Human Rights Commission if they feel that they have been discriminated against on the grounds of disability. Discrimination occurs when a disabled person is treated unfairly or less favourably than someone else, for example a non-disabled person, and such treatment cannot be justified. Discrimination occurs when a disabled learner is declined enrolment to a course on the grounds of disability without the TEO assessing how the student could complete the course with learning supports. Or when a disabled learner is given entry to a course but is refused learning supports (reasonable accommodations).

All organisations that offer goods, services, public facilities, transport, employment, education, training and accommodation must provide reasonable accommodations for disabled people defined under the New Zealand Human Rights Act. For tertiary organisations this includes all aspects of providing an inclusive environment, such as enrolment procedures, teaching practices, support services, the provision of enrolment information or course material and so on.

While many disabled learners receive invaluable assistance from disability support staff at tertiary organisations, we know that much of this support is still very reliant on only these staff. Disability support services show an increasing demand for learning support arrangements. The time has come to move from an individualised service approach to a wider, 'top down' or senior leadership-directed, all-of-institution approach.

The new Kia Ōrite Toolkit puts the responsibility for practising equity – through meeting best practice standards – onto all people providing and participating in all levels of every tertiary learning environment.

The Kia Ōrite Toolkit is a living document intended to be used collaboratively by learners and taura of the ethnicities and cultures in Aotearoa New Zealand and their tertiary providers.

To help TEOs apply good practices throughout a learner's journey, the toolkit consists of five sections, including both management and learning support implementation toolkits. These outline what best practice looks like in learner support and academic delivery, how an organisation can move towards these practices, and who they need to involve in the process. Of critical importance is the input of disabled learners to all stages of the process. This includes the design of buildings, course content, teaching practices, information and communication processes and support.

It is essential that disabled learners with different impairments are active partners in the development and review of these activities and the overall development of organisations' Disability Action Plans. It is also crucial that providers remember that disabled learners may experience additional barriers arising from membership of other equity groups. Groups such as Māori student associations, Pacific people's student associations, and international student associations should also be involved. The multiple ways of partnering with disabled learners and their representatives are discussed in the toolkit.

To support tertiary education providers to implement a fully inclusive tertiary education environment for disabled learners within New Zealand, the toolkit assists them to:

- understand the status of disabled learners in tertiary education in New Zealand
- develop a Disability Action Plan that includes objectives, performance indicators and timeframes, and allows them to monitor progress towards a fully inclusive environment for disabled learners
- identify potential barriers to participation and achievement that disabled learners face
- improve tertiary outcomes for disabled learners by providing guidance and resources
- be aware of policy and legal obligations relating to disabled learners in tertiary education.

There are some important approaches that underpin the creation of a fully inclusive tertiary education environment for disabled learners. These approaches require tertiary education providers to ensure that:

- disabled learners have equitable opportunities to achieve their individual capabilities and participate in all aspects of tertiary education life
- all interactions with disabled learners are characterised by respect for their rights, dignity, privacy, confidentiality and equality, and building a partnership with these learners to identify their learning support needs and the barriers to participation and achievement they face

- policies, procedures, services and facilities, including strategic planning and resource allocation, enable disabled learners to achieve equitable access to tertiary education and the full range of activities that encompass all aspects of their learning environments.
- an equitable learning environment is created by considering the needs of disabled learners in all aspects of the learning process, including course design, curriculum, delivery, placements, assessment and support strategies
- staff are trained to meet the requirements of disabled learners and they invite these learners to discuss their requirements and treat requests promptly and seriously
- they create a safe environment for disabled learners to:
  - make their requirements known in advance, so appropriate services are provided
  - share responsibility for negotiating and developing solutions, where possible
  - advise institutions of difficulties they encounter.

Overall, the aim of the Kia Ōrite Toolkit is to assist all staff to become more disability confident and for managers and wider staff to take more responsibility for implementing the toolkit's best practices, a disability action plan, and the support of disabled learners.

This toolkit can assist tertiary providers to create a framework that enables all staff to become disability confident by developing the infrastructure to ensure they can confidently and effectively support disabled learners.