Disability Action Plan 2023-2026

Introduction

AcademyEX is committed to equality of opportunity for all and equitable learner success, including for those students with impairments. We know that enabling disabled learners to benefit from and effectively contribute to the educational, social, cultural, political and economic environment in which we all live is critical to success for all.

There has been a conscious decision to refer to target learners in this strategy as learners with impairments, rather than disabled learners. Using the social model of disability as a framework, it is acknowledged that people and the environment can disable individuals with impairments (whether physical, cognitive, sensory or learning). In this way, individuals do not have a disability, but can be disabled and their active participation and engagement in education impacted by barriers that are put up by society (for example, social expectations, assumptions of ableism, inadequate digital or built infrastructure). We must dismantle those barriers and practise equity by implementing systems across our learning environments that assist all learners to realise their academic potential.

Te Ara Kōtihi and Creating Impactful Futures

Our vision is to create impactful futures by providing innovative learning programmes that build relevant skills and capabilities to match the requirements of our constantly changing world. Creating impactful futures for all learners, and ensuring equitable learners success and outcomes is central to our commitment and goals.

A whole-organisation approach, driven by those working with learners and supported by senior management. This has been a successful approach for academyEX in the past, with our Te Ara Kōtihi Teaching and Learning Strategy, where we have seen improved outcomes for Māori and Pacific Learners. We have always supported disabled learners and welcomed them to our programmes, however, a more explicit approach driven by this action plan and woven into our Te Ara Kōtihi Teaching and Learning strategy is the natural next step in our journey.

Purpose

The purpose of this Disability Action Plan is to outline academyEX's commitment to supporting all learners and to outline actions to support change and improve outcomes for learners during their education journey. Achieving an inclusive and equitable tertiary education environment for disabled learners to succeed is a key goal of our Disability Action Plan 2023-2026.

Our Commitment

At academyEX, we firmly believe in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all our learners. We are committed to practices that eliminate discrimination and promote equal opportunities for every individual, including those with impairments. Our approach is rooted in a strengths-based philosophy, acknowledging the unique abilities and talents of each learner. We believe that impairments should never be viewed as limitations, but rather as opportunities for growth and empowerment.

We recognize that diversity is our greatest strength, and we celebrate the rich tapestry of experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives that our learners bring to our institution. By embracing this diversity, we enhance the educational experience for all members of our community. We acknowledge that an inclusive education benefits all learners, enabling them to develop empathy, respect, and a broader understanding of the world. By eliminating discrimination and fostering an inclusive culture, we strive to create an environment where every learner feels valued, supported, and inspired to reach their highest aspirations.

Plan Goals

- To support all staff to become confident in their understanding of disability and how to support learners with impairments - both in formal teaching capacities but also in wider learner support spaces.
- To hear more from the voices of learners with impairments through effective partnerships and use their feedback to continue to improve our practices.
- To make more visible the support provided to learners with impairments to encourage broader participation in our programmes.
- To integrate our Disability Action Plan into existing academyEX strategies to enable a more coherent approach to supporting all learners and ensure all policies, procedures and practices contribute to equitable outcomes for all learners.

Plan Owner: Academic Director

Current Understanding of Learners with Impairments at academyEX

academyEX is a data-driven organisation and has access to many insights that help us to understand the community of learners with impairments, their self-declared disabilities and their learning successes. The following data helps to set the scene for this Disability Action Plan and highlights a number of considerations that need to be taken into account when thinking about how to work toward more equitable learner success for all learners.

Between January 2020 and May 2023, 2.7% of our learners declared during their enrolment that they have a disability (79 out of 2902 learners). Of those 79 students, 19 students also identified as Māori and/or Pacific (0.6% of the total number of learners). 75 of the students who indicated they have a disability also provided details on the impairments they have. Categorising these as illustrated in Figure 1.1, the following insights emerge:

Figure 1.1: Current data from self-declared disability during enrolment process

Category	Number of Learners	Percentage
Hearing Impairment	18	24.7%
Visual Impairment	5	6.8%
Neurodivergence	24	32.9%
Mental Health	3	4.1%
Physical/Mobility	22	30.1%

This data demonstrates a range of impairments identified by learners enrolling at academyEX. However, we believe that this data is an under-representation of the number of students who have impairments, which are discussed with staff once they have started their programme of study, developed relationships and built trust to discuss such personal matters. In particular, mental health and neurodivergence are suspected to be more prevalent. The under-representation in self-declaration of disability during the enrolment process is believed to be influenced by a number of factors, most notably the demographic of learners who academyEX serves. Our learners are older (average age is 44), in work, and come with significant personal and professional experience that has allowed them to develop strategies to deal with any mental health or neurodivergence- in fact, we have had students indicate that they are neurodiverse but do not see this as a disability, but as a superpower that allows them to engage with a unique perspective, fully contributing and participating in society. We need to take this into consideration when thinking about how to support students with disabilities to ensure we are upholding their mana and wisdom.

In regards to the outcomes for learners with impairments, our course completion data illustrates that students who have declared disabilities complete their courses at an equitable rate to all learners (82% of the learners who declared disabilities completed courses successfully that started between 1st January 2020 and 31st December 2022). 80% of those learners enrolled in qualifications that started after 1st January 2020 and ended before 31st December 2022 successfully completed their programme of study. This is also at an equitable rate to all learners.

A Note on the Development of this Plan: Evaluating Practice
This action plan was developed using the Kia Ōrite toolkit, with areas and best practice standards relevant to academyEX provision and learner cohort used to assess our current practice and identify actions for improved learner outcomes. Alignment to Outcome 1: Education of the Disability Action Strategy and Tertiary Education Strategy, specifically Priority 1: Learners at the Centre and Priority 2: Barrier Free Access, was also considered in our plan as we strive to ensure academyEX creates an inclusive learning environment for all. A summary of the assessment is provided in Appendix 1 and has informed our three year action plan.

Our Areas of Focus, Outcomes and Action Plan
A review of our practices has highlighted 6 key areas of interest from which targets and outcomes have been derived. Figure 1.2 below outlines actions identified to work toward those outcomes. These actions will continue to evolve.

Figure 1.2 Areas of Focus, Outcomes and Actions 2023-2026

		What outcomes do we want to achieve?	*What are the tasks required to achieve these outcomes?* *What resources are required? Who is responsible for these actions?*			
Relevant Plan Goal	**Area of Focus**	**Target/Outcome**	**2023 Actions**	**2024 Actions** (Indicative)	**2025 Actions** (Indicative)	**2026 Actions** (Indicative)
To support all staff to become confident in their understanding of disability and how to support learners with impairments - both in formal teaching capacities but also in wider learner support spaces.	Staff professional development to support staff to be more 'disability confident'	All Academic Staff (including student experience and Advisors) engage in professional development including training on inclusive teaching practices, disability awareness, and sensitivity to diverse needs to create an engaging and accessible learning environment for all.	Co-construct a Professional Development Plan with Academic Staff that includes at least 2 professional development opportunities for the remainder of 2023. *Who:* Instigated by the Academic Director with Academic staff, including a call for someone to lead this piece of work.	Annual Review of Professional Development Plan and identification of new opportunities that take into account staff needs (indicated through staff appraisal process) and learner feedback. *Who:* Academic Director and Project Lead		

			Resources: [ADECT Resources](#) [ACHIEVE Modules](#)	
To integrate our Disability Action Plan into existing academyEX strategies to enable a more coherent approach to supporting all learners and ensure all policies, procedures and practices contribute to equitable outcomes for all learners.	Integration of Disability Action Plan and actions into our Quality Management System	Integration of Disability Action Plan into Te Ara Kōtihi Teaching and Learning Strategy and other relevant policies to ensure that the place of learners with disabilities is visible in our organisations strategies and policies.	Review of Te Ara Kōtihi Strategy (which usually occurs at the time of Matariki) taking into account this Disability Action Plan in amendments and updates that are made. *Who:* Academic Director and Te Ara Kōtihi Working Group *Resources:* Time and collaboration across the organisations (Te Ara Kōthi is underpinned by a whole-organisation approach).	As Te Ara Kōtihi Strategy is reviewed annually, ensure learning emerging from other actions is integrated where relevant. During the review process, engage with learners, including those with impairments to ensure that reviews of strategy and policy take account of the changing needs of learners. *Who:* Te Ara Kōtihi Working Group
			As each Policy comes to be reviewed on an annual basis, updates to be made to integrate this Action Plan. *Who:* Academic Administrator	As each policy comes up for review, ensure learning emerging from other actions is integrated where relevant. *Who:* Academic Administrator
To hear more from the voices of learners with impairments through effective partnerships and use their feedback to continue to improve our practices.	Partnerships with the disabled community are developed to better inform our Disability Action Plan and continued iteration of actions moving forward.	Partnerships with disabled learners developed, including those who identify as Māori and Pacific for a more informed understanding of disability from a cultural perspective.	Identify opportunities for partnership, including seeking feedback from alumni and current learners who identify as having an impairment and establish relationships that can evolve into authentic partnerships. *Who:* Te Ara Kōtihi Working Group and Programme Leads	Continue to identify additional opportunities for partnering with different stakeholders - this could be to contribute to staff professional development or student support and pastoral care. Aim to identify and establish 1 partnership per year to establish a network of disability professionals who can integrate with our current Advisory Groups (e.g. Industry/Academic Advisory Group). *Who:* Te Ara Kōtihi Working Group

To make more visible the support provided to learners with impairments to encourage broader participation in our programmes.	Improve the visibility of support for learners with impairments, both for prospective and enrolled learners.	Learners with impairments see themselves in our organisation and feel that they can be their authentic selves while studying.	Review the Student Support Website and LMS pages, as well as our Prospectus and Key Learner Information (prospective and enrolled learners) with learners with impairments co-constructing updates to the pages. Complete 1-2 student stories which are used to demonstrate the impact of our programmes through learners sharing their experiences and have these published on our website. *Who:* General Manager and Director of Studies	Continue to ensure that the experiences of learners with impairments are visible in our marketing material and student support information, including review with key stakeholders (through partnerships indicated above. 2025: Update Disability Question during enrolment process in line with TEC requirements. Discuss with current learners and alumni other things that we could do to make them feel more comfortable answering those questions during their enrolment. *Who:* General Manager and Director of Studies
	Pastoral care and support practices for learners with impairments	Provide comprehensive support services tailored to the individual needs of learners with impairments to help them succeed academically and personally (Welfare and Learning Check-ins)	Seek feedback from learners with impairments about their experiences at academyEX, particularly the support services available and any gaps that they see in our offerings. Explore the implementation of a Pastoral Care programme for all learners with a psychologist (early conversations underway). *Who:* Academic Director with Director of Studies and Programme Leads (through Key Evaluative Question Reviews - quarterly).	Further develop student support services taking into account feedback from all learners. Consider the role that Welfare and Learning Check-ins could play for all learners, in a way that is beneficial to all stakeholders engaged to better understand how we can support learners.

	Ensure technology platforms and applications are accessible to all learners	All platforms and technologies used meet global accessibility standards to ensure learners with impairments are able to utilise platforms effectively.	Full audit of all academyEX platforms, information and resources to ensure that they are accessible to learners who may use assistive technologies during their study. *Who:* Academic Director and Chief Technology Officer supported by Digital Action Working Group *Reference:* [*Accessibility Charter*](#)	Ensure that procedures for the adoption of new platforms, technologies or updates to existing technologies specifically identify the need to consult with learners with impairments and other experts in this area to ensure our platforms are accessible to all.
	Ensure that our offices and teaching spaces are accessible to all learners	We provide accessible facilities, classrooms, and resources (including appropriate technology set up in the Lab) to ensure that all learners can participate fully in their educational journey.	Review our building accessibility in line with the standards highlighted in Appendix 1 and liaise with Building Managers if any issues are identified. *Who:* Health and Safety Working Group (led by General Manager and Office Manager)	Continue to ensure that our building remains accessible and if any renovations or alterations are to take place that learners with impairments are considered as a key stakeholder.

Notes:
- Funding and financial support for any of the above actions that require additional expenditure above and beyond what is currently allocated in budgets will be discussed at the Academic Governance Group in August 2023.
- 2024-2026 Actions are currently indicative and more high level than those indicated for 2023. At the annual review of the plan, actions will become more focused on concrete.

Continuous Evaluation and Improvement Processes

Our Disability Action Plan has a three-year timeframe to allow for development, the activities identified above to take place, and for outcomes to be monitored and assessed. This Action Plan will be reviewed annually, in line with our Te Ara Kōtihi Strategy. Insights and feedback gathered from a range of stakeholders, including learners themselves will provide data to inform decision making. It is anticipated that this data will be a mix of qualitative and quantitative and collected through a range of mechanisms (surveys, talanoa, focus groups).

Tracing and measuring change and actions will primarily be facilitated through Te Ara Kōtihi Team Implementation Plans and individual programme Key Evaluative Question Reviews. Senior Leadership are involved in these reviews, and full updates will be provided bi-monthly to the Academic Governance Group through Academic Board and its working groups.

Public Communication of Disability Action Plan

academyEX is committed to publishing this Disability Action Plan on our website alongside the following public statement (a summarised version of our Commitment outlined above) demonstrating our dedication to improving practices which eliminate discrimination for all learners.

Public Statement
At academyEX, we firmly believe in creating an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all our learners. We are committed to practices that eliminate discrimination and promote equal opportunities for every individual, including those with impairments. Our approach is rooted in a strengths-based philosophy, acknowledging the unique abilities and talents of each learner. We believe that impairments should never be viewed as limitations, but rather as opportunities for growth and empowerment. We strive to create an environment where every learner feels valued, supported, and inspired to reach their highest aspirations.

Appendix 1: Using the Kia Ōrite Toolkit

Note: This is a summary of a review of our current practices, with key areas for improvement translating into goals of the Disability Action Plan and aligned Actions as outlined in Figure 1.2. For each area, an overall assessment of our current practice is indicated with 'Activity Met; Partially; Not Met) as outlined as part of the Kia Ōrite Toolkit.

Area	Best Practice (relevant)	Context/Current Practice	Improvements
Recruitment	Disabled learners feature in promotional material, including those with less obvious learning supports. Promotional material is disseminated in alternative formats to a wide range of relevant community networks that disabled learners can access. Prospective disabled learners are encouraged and assisted to identify their specific support requirements, ideally prior to application for admission. Disabled learners can access online application processes including scholarship applications.	Recruitment and marketing information is available in accessible formats. We currently have a Student Support page on both our website and LMS, however the content of this could be improved. Note: pictorial representations of disabled earners alongside other learners using imagery of our learners (which is important to us) is difficult as for many of our students their impairments are not necessarily visible. All learners apply for our programmes online. Learners with impairments would be eligible for Scholarships offered (depending on other eligibility criteria (e.g. ethnicity, age, line of work)	Improve the visibility of support for learners with impairments on our online platforms (website, LMS) and other resources (e.g Prospectus, Key Information Pack) to students use to help inform their enrolment decision. Make changes to the disability question asked during the enrolment process in line with TEC. Work with Outreach Managers to ensure they are up to date with support services for earners so that they can confidently speak to learners with impairments and understand how we can best support learners.

Area	Best Practice (relevant)	Context/Current Practice	Improvements
Selection and Admission	Selection and admission policies and procedures are relevant to course and professional requirements and do not unjustifiably disadvantage or exclude disabled applicants. Staff involved with selection and admission provide appropriate support to disabled applicants in selection activities, use expertise to assess an applicant's support needs, receive effective guidance and training to prevent disability discrimination, and are able to clearly justify refusing entry to a course on the grounds of impairment. Course selection criteria are regularly reviewed to make sure they are suitable, applied appropriately, and do not discriminate against applicants with impairments. Appeal processes for learners rejected on the grounds of impairment are available and widely publicised.	Selection and admission policies and regulations (as approved by NZQA for all accredited programmes) do not disadvantage learners with impairments. If selection criteria are ever changed (which has not happened for any of our currently accredited programmes), these will remain non-discriminatory. Appeals processes are available to all students (through the Prospectus and Programme Handbooks).	Professional Development for staff who speak with applicants during the enrolment process (e.g. Master's interviews) to build confidence in assessing an applicant's support needs and then making a plan to support those learners.
Enrolment Processes	Enrolment, registration and induction processes take into account the physical, communication and information access requirements of disabled learners. Information about impairments is collected for relevant purposes only, the purpose of collection is clearly stated, measures to ensure confidentiality are followed, and the information collected does not appear on academic records or graduation documentation. Disabled learners are advised of the services available to assist them. The support needs of disabled learners are identified during the enrolment and induction process and the support confirmed with the learner when in place.	The enrolments process includes standard TEC questions related to accessing disability support services and asking applicants to indicate their disability. When intake class lists are disseminated to relevant staff (Programme Leads and Programme Coordinators) prior to the start of an intake, those students who have declared a disability are identifiable. This allows the Programme Lead to reach out to the learner to have a discussion about any support they might require (if they have not already been in touch).	We know that not all learners with impairments indicate their disability during enrolment, but are more open once they have built a relationship with staff. We need to think critically about why this might be the case and gather feedback from learners who have disclosed a disability post enrolment to uncover why they did not do so during their enrolment.

Area	Best Practice (relevant)	Context/Current Practice	Improvements
Funding and Withdrawal	Clear withdrawal policies and procedures exist, allowing withdrawal without academic or financial penalty if learners withdraw because of an impairment. Withdrawal policy and procedures are known to all learners and implemented consistently. Adequate funds are generated in the fee structure and/or through other non operating grant sources to provide effective services to support disabled learners, and disabled learners receive the same services as their nondisabled peers. Funding for disabled learners is used as set out by the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC).	Withdrawal policies and procedures are clearly linked for all students in their Programme Handbooks and in the Terms and Conditions signed upon enrolment. Withdrawal policies are implemented in a fair and consistent way for all learners. We do not have a student support service fee as part of the tuition fee of our programmes.	In previous years, as a PTE, academyEX has understood that we have not received equity funding for disabled learners, however, we believe this has now changed. We need to determine how this funding is allocated (and through which budgets) and accessible to support learners with impairments.
Complaints and Appeals	Policies and procedures established in relation to learner complaints, appeals, harassment and disciplinary procedures cover impairment issues. Disabled learners receive these policies and procedures in an appropriate manner and format and are aware of their right to have an independent advocate.	Complaints and Appeals policies and procedures are published for all learners to access and do not discriminate based on learners abilities. All learners can have an independent support person if working through a complaint, appeal or disciplinary matter.	None identified at this time.

Area	Best Practice (relevant)	Context/Current Practice	Improvements
Physical Environment	All buildings that are required comply with or exceed the standards identified Physical access audits are completed by trained BarrierFree auditors, in consultation with disability support staff and learners with different impairments. A physical access plan to improve physical access to above the minimum standard NZS 4121:2001 for learners with different impairments is developed, resources allocated, and an ongoing monitoring and review schedule established and implemented as part of the disability action plan. The annual review of the physical access plan involves learners with different impairments, disability support staff and, where necessary, those responsible for audits. Policies and procedures exist to ensure that the needs of disabled learners are taken into account when any new building work or refurbishment takes place, including consulting with the parties mentioned above. Key access features such as location of lifts, accessible telephones, toilets, routes, entrances, and parking are clearly signed and identified on location maps. Disabled learners are aware of recent changes affecting physical access during work on buildings and grounds, and know where to go if they find an access issue and want to report it.	The building where our offices are located meets accessibility standards.	Our building compliance is overseen by our Building Manager. Health and Safety Working Group to investigate BarrierFree Audits and the development of any physical access plans. Signage indicating key access features to be reviewed by the Health and Safety Working Group and communicate with the Building Manager if any new signage is required.

Area	Best Practice (relevant)	Context/Current Practice	Improvements
Facilities, Equipment and Health and Safety	Facilities and equipment planning incorporates the requirements of disabled learners and occurs in consultation with these learners and disability support staff. Fire evacuation, health, safety and security procedures consider all disabled learners. Information technology systems, computer arrangements and assistive technology maximise access to learning and consider the learning support needs of disabled learners. Arrangements for events (e.g. graduation ceremonies, registration and social events) ensure equal access and amenities for disabled learners.	Fire Warden training includes practices to support disabled individuals in the event of an emergency. Event arrangements consider the needs of learners with impairments (e.g. Graduation)	Full audit of technology platforms and systems (including those used to facilitate hybrid delivery) to ensure that the needs of learners with impairments are met.
Technology and Digital Platforms	The adoption of online tools, technological platforms and device-based software licences for teaching, learning and assessment is undertaken with consultation of disabled learners and is accessible for their assistive technology. The use of online tools, technological platforms and device-based software for learning by disabled learners is supported by academic, teaching, demonstrator and learning support staff. The acquisition of new assistive technologies to assist and be used by disabled learners is discussed with those who require this technology. Teaching, IT and other support staff receive training and other resources so they are familiar with assistive technologies that disabled learners may find useful.	Learners are supported to utilise technology platforms and online tools.	Full audit of technology platforms and systems (including those used to facilitate hybrid delivery) to ensure that the needs of learners with impairments are met (including meeting global accessibility standards for web based platforms). Include in professional development plans content related to assistive technologies to ensure that staff are able to support learners to maximise the value the technology can provide.

Area	Best Practice (relevant)	Context/Current Practice	Improvements
Policy and Planning	A disability policy to achieve a fully inclusive educational environment for disabled learners, is developed in partnership with disabled learners and disability support staff. A disability action plan to achieve a fully inclusive educational environment is developed in partnership with disabled learners and disability support staff, has measurable goals and targets, and is reviewed and reported on annually. All policies, procedures and planning processes take into consideration the participation and achievement of disabled learners in academic and other areas of the learning environment. Senior management commitment and accountability for achieving the agreed strategic outcomes in the disability action plan is clearly defined, owned and resourced. Management systems provide accurate information about the participation, progression and achievement of disabled learners and identify barriers that impact on this with a view to continuous improvement.	All policies were developed with the intent that they contributed to an inclusive learning environment for all learners, including those with impairments. Ongoing policy reviews ensure that policies remain up to date and relevant. Senior Management and Leadership (i.e. Executive Team, Leadership Team and Academic Governance Group) are committed to and accountable for achieving the outcomes in this disability action plan. Continued socialisation of this plan will build further buy in and opportunities for review. Our experience with plans and strategies like this (i.e Te Ara Kōtihi) shows that whilst senior management and leadership commitment is critical, in an organisation like ours, grassroots initiatives and actions identified by those interacting directly with learners on a daily basis get traction and positive outcomes emerge.	Our current Teaching and Learning Strategy (all encompassing), Te Ara Kōtihi will be reviewed to ensure that it is fully inclusive of learners with impairments, and those learners provided an opportunity to provide feedback and contribute to the review.
Monitoring and Evaluation	Institutional barriers and the impact of these on disabled learners are identified and reported by senior management through the disability action plan monitoring. There are a range of monitoring and evaluation systems to measure progress with goals and targets to remove these barriers to participation, retention and achievement of disabled learners. Effective systems are in place to provide a forum to raise, discuss and advocate on issues affecting disabled learners.	Any barriers, challenges or opportunities identified through ongoing review (Programme Level, Organisational Working Group Level, Academic Board Level) are raised with the Academic Governance Group.	None identified at this time - ongoing continuous improvement of our monitoring and evaluation practices is part of our normal processes.

At academyEX we also believe the design, development and delivery of our learning must be inclusive for learners with impairments. During review of our practices, we also considered how our teaching and learning practices are also inclusive of learners with impairments.

Area	Best Practice (relevant)	Context/Current Practice	Improvements
Flexible Learning Approaches	Teaching and Learning (including assessment practices) provide opportunities for learners with impairments to engage successfully with the curriculum and assessment.	*Activity Met.* We offer a range of teaching and assessment methods (e.g. written, oral, visual) that accommodate different learning styles, ensuring that learners with impairments can engage with the curriculum effectively.	Additional Staff Professional Development to be provided to ensure staff are confident with implementing inclusive pedagogical practices.