Briefing Note: Disabled people and tertiary education

To: Hon Chris Hipkins, Minister of Education
Cc: Hon Tracey Martin, Associate Minister of Education
     Hon Carmel Sepuloni, Minister for Disability Issues

Date: 8 October 2019
Priority: High

Security Level: In Confidence
METIS No: 1208095

Drafter: s 9(2)(a)
DDI: s 9(2)(a)

Key Contact: Round Robin: No
Messaging seen by Communications team: Yes

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is for you to:

Note that the Ministry of Education has completed a report on the participation and achievement of disabled people in tertiary education, which will be published on Education Counts in late October 2019.

Agree that this Briefing Note will be proactively released.

Summary

- This is the first comprehensive report undertaken on the participation and achievement of disabled people in tertiary education, and provides a baseline view to inform policy and operational responses. It makes use of the 2013 Disability Survey.

- The report finds that disabled and non-disabled people had similar overall rates of participation in tertiary education. However, disabled people were more likely to be enrolled in Level 1 to 3 certificates, and less likely to be enrolled at bachelors and above, than non-disabled people. These differences were greater for disabled people with higher support needs.

- Disabled students aged 16 to 39 had somewhat lower course pass rates, on average, than non-disabled students. There was no difference in course pass rates for older students (aged 40 to 64). Nor was there any difference by the overall level of support need of disabled students. However, 38% of disabled students who had higher support needs reported they would like more support with their study.
Disabled peoples' participation rates in tertiary education were largely explained by their lower levels of achievement at school. However, at each level of tertiary education attainment, disabled people were less likely to be in employment than non-disabled people, suggesting that barriers into employment exist for disabled people regardless of their level of education attainment.

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27/10/19
Background

1. The Ministry of Education (the Ministry) has completed a report on the participation and achievement of disabled people in tertiary education. The report makes use of the 2013 Disability Survey (the Survey), linked to tertiary education data in Statistics New Zealand’s Integrated Data Infrastructure. This is the first comprehensive analysis of disabled people and tertiary education using the Survey.

2. The findings in the report will inform policy for disabled people in tertiary education. This includes the new unified funding system (particularly, the new learner-based funding approach) and implementing the Reform of Vocational Education (RoVE). It will also inform *Shaping a Stronger Education with New Zealanders*, which encompasses the new Tertiary Education Strategy (TES) and National Education and Learning Priorities (NELP).

Findings

3. The Survey was a follow-up survey to the 2013 Census. It included a comprehensive list of questions to identify disabled people. It estimated that 21% of 16 to 64 year olds had a disability. The proportion was higher among older people, due to health conditions or injuries occurring later in life. The most common main impairments were mobility, hearing and psychological/psychiatric. Around half of all disabled people had more than one type of impairment. The responses in the Survey can be used to identify a group of disabled people with higher support needs, who made up 23% of all disabled people aged 16 to 64. This proportion was consistent across age groups.

4. Disabled adults generally had lower level school qualifications than non-disabled adults. This continued to be the case for younger people, as it had been for older people. They also are more likely to participate at lower levels of tertiary education and have lower levels of post-school qualifications. Most of the difference in tertiary participation and qualifications can be explained by the lower levels of achievement at school.

5. Disabled people with the same level of education were less likely to be in full-time work, and more likely not to be in the labour force than similarly qualified non-disabled people. However, disabled people were no more likely to be in part-time work than non-disabled people. This suggests that many disabled people are faced with a choice of either taking full-time work or not being in work at all, with there being generally limited options for part-time work.

6. Disabled students were more likely to be enrolled in foundation tertiary education (Level 1 to 3 certificates), about as likely to be enrolled in vocational education, including industry training (Levels 4 to 7 non-degree) and less likely to be enrolled in degree level and above as compared to non-disabled students.

7. Educational participation and achievement varied by gender, ethnic group and socio-economic status. Having a disability had a multiplying effect over the educational differences between demographic groups. For example, in each demographic group, disabled students were about 1.3 times as likely to have no post-school qualification and half as likely to have a bachelors degree or higher.

8. Among younger tertiary education students (aged 16 to 39 years old), disabled students had lower course pass rates than non-disabled students. There was no difference in course pass rates for students aged 40 to 64. Nor was there any difference by the level of support need of disabled students. However, 38% of disabled
students with higher support needs reported they had a greater need for learning support, not all of which is met.

9. Around a third of disabled people who were not in study, and who said they would like to study in the future, felt they would be limited by the types of courses available or by the amount of study they could do. This proportion was higher for disabled people with higher support needs.

10. Many of the differences in participation and achievement between people with different types of impairment were not statistically significant. This was partly due to small sample sizes in the Survey. More consistent differences showed up by the level of support need.

Quality of tertiary education information on disabled people

11. The Single Data Return includes an indicator on whether students have a disability. This information is collected on provider enrolment forms. Appendix A in the report compares the enrolment indicator with responses to the Survey.

12. The Survey estimated that 17% of all students were disabled. This compares with only 7% of students indicating a disability on their enrolment form. Furthermore, nearly half of the students who indicated a disability on their enrolment form did not meet the definition of disabled in the Survey. This finding suggests that the disability question on enrolment forms is a poor measure and misses many disabled students.

13. Improving the collection of data on disabled students in both provider-based and work-based learning will be considered as part of the implementation of RoVE.

Consultation

14. The draft report has been shared with the Tertiary Education Commission, the Ministry of Business Innovation and Employment, the Ministry of Social Development, the Office for Disability Issues, the Human Rights Commission and Statistics New Zealand. Their comments have been incorporated.

15. An embargoed copy will also be forwarded to the interdepartmental Disability Data and Evidence Working Group.

Key risks and benefits

16. The Ministry considers the risks associated with the publication of this report to be low. Review comments have raised concern that the report identifies disadvantages faced by disabled people without offering solutions. The purpose of the report is to improve our understanding of the data, so that solutions can be developed.

17. The information contained in the report is of high benefit to inform policy and public discussion on supporting disabled students to participate and achieve in tertiary education.

Release and publication

18. The Ministry plans to publish the report on Education Counts by the end of October 2019. The report will be professionally proofread before publication. We will work with your office on communication messages before publication.
Disclaimer

19. Access to the anonymised data used in this report was provided by Statistics New Zealand in accordance with security and confidentiality provisions of the Statistics Act 1975. The findings are not Official Statistics. The results in this paper are the work of the authors, not Statistics New Zealand, and have been confidentialised to protect individuals from identification.