

Addressing Disability Access at the National University of Samoa

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Abstract

The National University of Samoa is immersed with the important task of refurbishing its facilities to cater to the increasing need for disability access. Since its establishment in 1984 and despite diligent efforts, infrastructure has always been an issue for the University due to its limited resources. The emergence of international and national legislations has made it mandatory for workplace and education facilities to cater to the needs of people with disabilities. With the recent movement of inclusive education to cater to people with disabilities, the pressure on the University and its planning and infrastructure is building year by year. This paper provides a brief context of the University's infrastructure development and the challenges it faces in addressing disability access. Additionally, the paper briefly covers on the emergence of international and national legislations on disability access and its contexts and influence to the infrastructure development of the National University of Samoa.

Introduction: Background of the National University of Samoa Disability Infrastructure

The National University of Samoa (NUS) was established by an Act of Parliament in 1984. During this period, the NUS Campus was located at Malifa, the current location of the Ministry of Education, Sports and Culture (MESCC) and the Leififi College. The NUS infrastructure at the time only consisted of two separate two-storey buildings, and an adjoining one-storey building in between. The NUS Malifa Campus facilities did not cater to people with disabilities (PWD). This situation was not an issue as the NUS student population during its location at Malifa was quite small with the pool of students drawn mainly from those who passed the New Zealand University Entry examinations from various secondary schools across the country. The NUS during its Malifa tenure primarily offered certificate and diploma level courses through the University Preparatory Year programme. This meant that the NUS student population remained relatively young and likely did not exceed the age of 21. The number of NUS teaching staff remained between 14 to 20 members consisting mainly of full-time lecturers (Groves, 2019 p. 28 -29). The NUS lecturers, during its Malifa tenure, were relatively young for tertiary-level lecturers with the majority being fresh graduates. This meant that the need for disability-friendly facilities was likely low during the NUS tenure at Malifa.

The Government of Samoa initially secured the Japan International Corporation Agency (JICA) to fund and build the new and much larger campus for the NUS in 1986. The campus did not materialise until 1997 when the NUS relocated to its current location, the Le Papaigalagala Campus at Vaivase. The move to the new campus comprised of the NUS merging with the Western Samoa Teachers College (WSTC), which was a government funded institution to train the much needed teachers for Samoa. WSTC brought with them 23 teaching staff forming the Faculty of Education (Groves, 2019 p.35). The new and improved campus built by JICA did not take into account disability access. During this period, the NUS offered bachelor level programmes in Arts and Education. This meant that the NUS students were now much more mature although still dominated by the UPY programme. The NUS staff members also had a good balance of mature and young lecturers. The need for disability friendly facilities by now

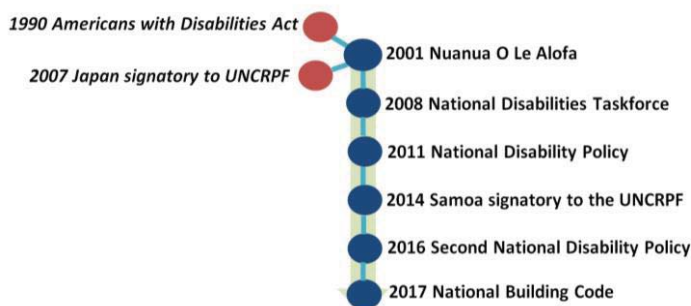
should have surfaced. However, it was not until the Government of Samoa secured JICA once more to build the Le Papaigalagala Campus extension in 2006 to cater to the merger of the NUS and Samoa Polytechnic that the first disability access facilities emerged. Since 2006, the NUS staff and student population has grown significantly. The NUS has also expanded in infrastructure with the construction of the Fale Samoa, Mulinu'u Campus, Culture Centre, Ancillary Building and Moto'otua Campus, which all failed to fully address disability access in design and construction.

Emergence of Disability Access Legislations

Today it is the norm that facilities, institutions and individuals cater to PWD. Catering to PWD has become such a regular expectation in society that people tend to forget how recent the movement for disability access began. The first renowned disability access legislation was only signed in 1990 by the United States President George Bush. This was the signing of the Americans with Disabilities Act at the White House (Mayerson, 1992). President Bush in his signing speech described the occasion:

“With today's signing of the landmark Americans for Disabilities Act, every man, woman, and child with a disability can now pass through once-closed doors into a bright new era of equality, independence, and freedom...” (Mayerson, 1992)

Figure 1: Disability Legislation



Disability access legislation and initiatives in Samoa did not start until the early 2000s and is still struggling to gain effective momentum today with PWD still facing some forms of discrimination (Retzlaff, 2020). In 2001, the Government of Samoa formed the Nuanua O Le Alofa (NOLA), ‘a disability advocacy organization to advocate for equal rights and opportunities for persons with disabilities in Samoa’ (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2018 p.12). Seven years later in 2008, the Government of Samoa supported the formation of a National Disability Task Force to oversee the work on PWD. With the establishment of the task force the Government of Samoa conducted a nationwide comprehensive legislative review. As a result, in 2014 Samoa became a signatory to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD). By 2015 an implementation plan was developed by the Government of Samoa in collaboration with UNCRPD (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2018 p.12). By 2016, the Government of Samoa developed the second National Disability Policy and the Disability Disaster Management Policy (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2018 p. 12). It was not until 2017 that the National Building Code of Samoa was revised specifically to cater to disability access (Ministry of Works,

Transport and Infrastructure, 2017). This situation clearly indicates that the non-inclusive design and construction of the majority of NUS facilities was merely the lack of national legislation to enforce the incorporation of disability access facilities in buildings. Japan's signing with UNCRPD in 2007 explains why the 2006 Le Papaigalagala Campus extension, led by JICA was designed and constructed to cater to disability access. This action was due to the ratification of the PWD legislations in Japan leading up to 2007 (Mayumi, 2014). The relaxed development pace of Samoa meant that it was only natural that legislations addressing PWD access will come into effect much later than the United States of America and Japan.

United Nations Development Goals and the Development of National Legislation in Samoa

Disability access is incorporated in five of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. These include Goal 4: Quality Education, Goal 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth, Goal 10: Reduced Inequalities, Goal 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities, and lastly Goal 17: Partnerships for the Goals. Goal 4 on Quality Education places emphasis on inclusive and equitable education delivery. Goal 4 points out the importance for PWD to have equal access to all levels of education and vocational trainings. Goal 4 also states clearly that education buildings and teaching facilities must be designed and upgraded to address disability access (United Nations, 2020). Samoa's signing with the UNCRPD inevitably means that these goals have to be reflected in the national and sector priorities. On the national level, Samoa has taken various initiatives to collect information and data to inform PWD related legislation and policies. Samoa's National Disability Policy 2011-2016 was launched with the aim to "create a human rights-based, inclusive and barrier free society, which advocates for and empower people with disabilities". The Childcare and Protection Legislation (2013) outlines and details the need to provide necessities of life to a PWD or is otherwise liable to an imprisonment term of up to seven years.

It is unlikely that the initial legislation would have sufficient data on PWD to support policy makers due to its recent intensification and momentum. It was only during their developments that the Samoa Bureau of Statistics incorporated the *Washington Group Extended Set of Disability Questions* in its Demographic and Health Survey to collect disability data. Furthermore, a more recent survey *2016 Samoa Population and Housing Census (PHC)*, incorporated the short set of questions to collect similar information from all households that were surveyed in Samoa at the time of the Census (Samoa Disability Monograph, 2018). Samoa's initiatives to collect data and establish policies looked to equalise the opportunities for PWD as outlined in the *Pacific Framework for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*, adopted by the 47th Pacific Islands Forum Leaders' Meeting in 2016. By 2018, the Samoa Disability Monograph was developed as an analysis of the 2016 population and housing census, which documents the extent of disabilities and their impact on the lives of people in Samoa. The incorporation of PWD questions in the 2016 census and the release of the Disability Monograph was timely as the results were intended to inform the development of a successor to the National Disability Policy 2011-2016.

Disability in the Education Sector and the National University of Samoa

In response to the national legislation prioritisation of disability access, MESC has developed an *Inclusive Education Policy* that focuses on training teachers to aid in Inclusive Education (IE) principles. The MESC approach is centred at equipping teachers with skills, is to provide support programmes and introduce inclusive education plans for PWD. The ‘number of children with a disability who are enrolled in Government schools’ is one of a few critical key performance indicators (KPIs) outlined by the Education Sector Support Programme. IE principles seek to mainstream students with a disability in regular schools. Through the Education Sector Plan (ESP), the MESC approach was to channel IE principles in levels, starting with early childhood education (ECE) and primary education. As a result, “more students with a disability now participate at primary level, due to initiatives taken during the first ESP, but numbers are still very low at secondary level and in technical, vocational education and training (TVET) levels” (Education Sector Plan 2019-2024).

The ESP 2019-2024 3.2.2 Goal 2 is to ‘provide everyone with access to good quality education and training opportunities’ – this is inclusive of PWD, to have fundamental rights to the same education opportunities. The ESP 2019-2024 emphasizes the need to develop teachers’ capacity to meet IE standards, developing programmes to identify PWD and support them to participate fully in all school activities, and to develop a process to ensure that students with a disability transition from ECE to primary and beyond (Education Sector Plan 2019-2024 p. 33). The ESP also identifies clearly that the inclusion of disability friendly classrooms require appropriate facilities and special resources. In addition to the ESP, MESC launched the ‘Samoa Inclusive Education Handbook 2019’ to support the implementation of the Inclusive Education Policy for Students Living with Disability. Unfortunately, the reality is that the options for PWD to be admitted into post-secondary education training is limited by the lack of facilities and trainers who have the capacity to be able to work with students with special learning needs (Education Sector Plan 2019-2024 p. 17). This aspect requires NUS to step in and take responsibility as the leading tertiary institution in the country.

The NUS Corporate Plan and Strategic Plans 2017–2021 are the two main documents that currently guide the direction of the University. Strategic priorities 2 (Uphold Excellence in Teaching and Learning) and 5 (Creating Universal Design for a Digital Environment) sustain similar wider outcomes to improve inclusive, accessible and quality education. Perhaps, these measures are the extent of the University’s efforts to address learning for PWD. Priority 5 mentions general inclusivity in its’ 5.1.3 Activity; [to] Develop aspects of the educational experience to be more inclusive for students, parents, staff, instructors, administrators and visitors. Similarly, 2.1.3 (c) in the Strategic Plan 2017-2021 urges a revised curriculum that is strengthened to meet the needs of students with a wide range of abilities, learning styles and preferences. Both the Strategic and Corporate Plans lack specific priorities and goals to achieving inclusive education, particularly for PWD where not only the infrastructural needs are discussed, but to align with the ESP to increase the capacity of staff to be able to support learners with a disability.

The Education Statistics

Planning is ensuring that NUS could facilitate towards disability inclusive development and how to support the process of change towards this project. Shown in the Table 1, throughout year 2015 to 2019, the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) of the Education Sector continues to stay above 70% (MESC, 2019). This figure indicates the number of students enrolled into secondary school over the number of population in the age of 13-17 years old. For NUS, the students enrolled into the programmes from foundation, TVET and higher education are in the age group of 18-39 years from 2015-2019 (NUS, 2017).

Table1: GER in Secondary Education 2015-2019

Year	Enrolment in secondary education			GER %		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
2015	7,980	8,762	16,742	71%	85%	78%
2016	7,967	8,556	16,523	71%	83%	77%
2017	7,803	8,494	16,297	69%	82%	75%
2018	7,702	8,298	16,000	75%	89%	82%
2019	7,767	8,598	16,365	70%	86%	77%

The Table 2 (NUS, 2015 -2017c) shows that the GER in percentage (%) is above 6% and still increasing to 6.8% in year 2018 and 2019. The percentages indicate that the number of students enrolling into both secondary and university is increasing and above the baselines of students enrolled each year. This increase is still predicted to remain despite with the recent Covid-19 pandemic.

Table 2: GER in National University of Samoa 2015-2019

Year	Total	GER%
2015	2887	4.9
2016	2991	5.1
2017	3393	6.1
2018	3522	6.8
2019	3273	6.8

Referring to the latest population survey or Census 2016, in the Table 3 (below), it shows a summary of the percentage of PWD, or a person that encounters the degree of difficulty in the functioning domains (i.e. Seeing, Hearing, Mobility, Memory, Self-care and Communication) in gender and age group. For functioning domains, regardless of the age group 50+, the young age of 5-17 years old has the majority population in the domain of memory, self-care and communication, however they also have the highest rate of “cannot do at all” for communication with a 33.4 compare to the age group 18-49 with 30.2 percent. Nevertheless, the age group 18-49 also has the highest number total for “cannot do at all” category for the rest of the functioning domains (Samoa Bureau of Statistics, 2018). This matter is a concern for the University as this age group (18-49) is the admission age-group into NUS.

Table 3: Population aged 5 years and above by functional domain, degree of difficulty and by Gender & Age

Functioning domains	Sex			Age group			Region			
	Total	Male	Female	5-17	18-49	50+	AUA	NWU	RoU	Savaii
Seeing										
Total	7,151	47.8	52.2	6.9	15.5	77.5	20.5	30.5	22.0	27.0
Some difficulty	6,026	47.8	52.2	6.1	15.3	78.5	21.3	30.6	21.9	26.2
A lot of difficulty	843	47.1	52.9	9.4	14.6	76.0	17.1	29.9	20.9	32.2
Cannot do at all	282	49.7	50.4	16.7	23.1	60.3	14.9	30.1	26.2	28.7
Hearing										
Total	4,252	50.0	50.1	11.6	13.6	74.8	16.2	28.4	24.3	31.2
Some difficulty	3,303	49.3	50.7	10.9	13.1	76.0	17.0	28.5	24.0	30.5
A lot of difficulty	680	51.3	48.7	11.3	11.8	76.9	13.5	29.0	24.3	33.2
Cannot do at all	269	54.3	45.7	21.2	24.2	54.7	12.6	25.3	27.5	34.6
Mobility										
Total	5,060	44.6	55.4	7.7	11.3	81.0	16.8	28.2	24.2	30.8
Some difficulty	3,334	44.8	55.2	7.5	10.5	82.0	18.1	27.7	24.3	29.9
A lot of difficulty	1,023	44.0	56.0	6.7	10.4	82.9	14.8	26.7	23.4	35.2
Cannot do at all	703	44.2	55.8	10.2	16.2	73.5	13.8	32.6	25.2	28.5
Memory										
Total	4,361	47.6	52.4	19.1	14.3	66.6	14.0	27.0	25.2	33.9
Some difficulty	3349	47.8	52.2	18.6	12.3	69.1	13.9	27.3	25.3	33.5
A lot of difficulty	668	47.5	52.5	17.8	18.0	64.2	16.0	24.9	24.3	34.9
Cannot do at all	344	46.2	53.8	26.2	27.0	46.8	10.5	28.5	25.6	35.5
Self-care										
Total	3,800	46.4	53.6	25.1	11.9	63.0	15.6	26.1	25.7	32.7
Some difficulty	2,420	47.9	52.1	28.8	9.9	61.3	16.3	24.4	25.6	33.7
A lot of difficulty	780	44.5	55.5	19.6	12.6	67.8	15.1	27.8	25.8	31.3
Cannot do at all	600	43.0	57.0	17.5	19.0	63.5	13.3	30.7	25.8	30.2
Communication										
Total	3,181	49.3	50.7	30.6	18.7	50.7	14.5	25.1	25.3	35.1
Some difficulty	2238	49.0	51.0	29.9	16.4	53.7	14.6	24.7	25.7	34.9
A lot of difficulty	605	50.1	49.9	31.4	20.8	47.8	15.5	25.6	23.1	35.7
Cannot do at all	338	50.3	49.7	33.4	30.2	36.4	12.1	26.6	26.0	35.2

In Table 4 (below), the survey 2018 shows that the number of PWD in higher education is nearly 250 people from the population of disabilities of 3,370. Secondary schools have a high number of 1,236 students with disability (5% of their population) (SBS, 2018). From the statistics it is predicted that PWD enrollment into the University will in fact rise due to the increase of PWD in secondary schools.

Table 4: Population aged 5 years and above with disability by educational attainment, 2018

Background characteristics	Total population on (5+)	Never been to school	Preschool	Primary School	Secondary School	Higher education	Special needs education	Missionaries	Missing
Total									
Total	167,633	1.8	1.1	31.5	51.2	14.1	0.1	0.1	0.2
With disabilities									
Total	3,370	9.6	1.6	41.5	36.7	7.2	1.6	1.0	0.6

NUS Infrastructure Design

When the NUS was established at the Malifa Campus, the buildings used were existing infrastructures that underwent renovation and changed purpose from being office and storage facilities to tertiary-level teaching classrooms. The donor restrictions to fund only the University of the South Pacific and the tight budget of the University during its Malifa tenure (Groves, 2019 p. 26-29) meant that even if the idea was thought of, the University would not be able design and develops any major infrastructures to cater to PWD. The design of the Le Papaigalagala Campus mountain side, which was completed in 1997, was done in close collaboration with the Government of Samoa. The WSTC was also consulted in the construction of the design in preparation for the merger. The NUS staff and governing body itself was not consulted. However, it is unclear if the consultation of the University during the design process would have made an impact to the structures being more disability friendly. The Le Papaigalagala Campus mountain side is a linked set of two-storey facilities constructed on a slope. With no disability access infrastructure built, this means that all the top floors are inaccessible to PWD. Parts of the facilities being built on a slope also creates further complication for designing to cater for disability access. The completion of the campus extension in 2006 – also referred to as the Le Papaigalagala ocean side – was the first move of NUS facilities being inclusive to PWD. Its design catering to PWD was not just new to the NUS but also to the whole country as the majority of existing infrastructure at the time did not cater to PWD. The trend of disability access suggestively should have been incorporated to all the NUS plans for new facilities from 2006 onwards. Unfortunately, with the lack of legislations and awareness, this was not to be.

Figure 2: NUS Malifa Capmpus



Image(s): NUS, 2004

By 2007, the NUS submitted an application for the funding and construction of a Campus at Mulinu'u to house the School of Maritime Training and the Faculty of Science Marine Research facility. The three-storey campus was funded and constructed by the People's Republic of China. The design of the Mulinu'u Campus did not take into consideration, access for PWD with no provision of ramps or an elevator. The construction of the large NUS Fale Samoa also presented the same concern. Although the Fale Samoa is arguably still accessible to PWD, it is not accessible by design with no provision for ramps. The construction of the two storeys Ancillary Building in 2014 on the Le Papaigalagala Campus housing the Financial Services and the Academic Quality Unit also failed in design to address disability access. The only other building project to have taken disability access into its design is the Culture Centre, which houses the Centre for Samoan Studies. The Culture Centre is a set of three buildings complimented by three smaller fale o'o (traditional Samoan housing) leading up to the main NUS Fale Samoa. Although the Culture Centre was designed to accommodate disability access, its poor and incomplete construction has prohibited the buildings to fully accommodate to PWD as indicated in its design. In 2015, the NUS received directives from the Government of Samoa to take on the School of Medicine. With this the NUS inherited the Moto'otua Campus which is an old single floor building facility. The buildings low foundation and past incorporations of minor ramps and concrete paths to the entrance of the building has made the Moto'otua Campus accessible for PWD although it is likely that it was not by design.

Figure 3: Le Papaigalagala Campus Map



Conclusion: The Plan and Lessons Learnt

In the Samoa National Policy on Disability 2011-2016 Bulletin, the Core Outcome areas as listed under its mission are:

1. Advocacy and awareness;
2. Early detection and intervention;
3. Independent living and economic development;
4. Provision of support, health services and assistive devices;
5. Education (training/sports/recreation);
6. Access (information/transport/built environment);
7. Women with disabilities.

Figure 4: Phase one – Le Papaigalagala Mountain Side



The core values designates the University's role and aim to build the facilities suitable not only for non-disabled students but also to establish the objective number six (6) 'Access (information/transport/built environment) – (a) Ensure national construction standards providing access for people with disabilities are fully implemented'. By integrating this into NUS buildings, it will also achieve the first objective of 'Advocacy and awareness; as to empower people with disabilities to promote and advocate for their human rights' (MWCSO, 2009). This project will market the facilities available to PWD to ensure that they have full access to all facilities and that they are safe and secure around all areas within the NUS campuses. This strategy ensures that all PWD have the right to have equal opportunities with the education and resources provided for them for further education. To address disability access at NUS a realistic and sustainable approach must be taken. The realities and funding constraints clearly indicate

that it is unlikely that the NUS will be able to resolve disability access in all the facilities and campuses simultaneously. It is therefore more feasible for the University to address disability access in phases. This approach allows the University to proceed with projects using its own budget. It also increases attainment rates to small grants such as the Education Sector Funding Scheme. This approach was a notable success with the successful procurement of a small grant from the Education Sector Funding Scheme to implement the first phase at addressing disability access.

Phase one of addressing disability access focused on the Mountain side of the Le Papaigalagala Campus. This construction included the officialising disability parking spaces, construction of large and small ramps (refer to Figure 4). The next phases will eventually cover the rest of the Le Papaigalagala Campus before eventually moving to the Mulinu'u and Moto'otua campuses. In order for the NUS to successfully address disability access on its campuses, it is important to identify and acknowledge the constraints. From the implementation of phase one, three constraints were identified: (1) enforcement of parking spaces, (2) specialisation limitation and (3) other lessons learnt pertaining internal processes.

Enforcement of Parking Spaces

The enforcement of parking spaces pertaining to disability parking is a systematic issue that needs to be addressed on a national level. 'Disability Parking' or giving priority to those affected by a disability is a newly introduced concept that some may even refer to as a 'European idea' and thus is not strictly adhered to. Until such time that the general population respects the need for accessibility of disabled people, violation penalties may need to be developed and implemented/enforced both within the University and nationally.

Specialisation Limitations

Building ramps at particular locations on campus has proven difficult in some respect. The mountainous landscape the University is situated on makes it problematic to meet certain wheelchair specification requirements. In saying this, the limited operational budget available for minor infrastructure projects does not allow for specialist designs and therefore not all ramps constructed on campus are consistent with precise and standard wheelchair specifications (i.e. some ramps require wheelchair users to be assisted.)

Lessons Learnt

University projects are undertaken through a strenuous process involving multiple divisions within the University. The current process dictates for infrastructure that the planning unit carries out initial development of relevant MOUs, contracts and arrangements with relevant suppliers and contractors. Once funding is secured, Property Maintenance (PM) is responsible for ensuring the contractors meet the requirements of the written agreement. Furthermore, Occupational Health and Safety office must conduct a health and safety audit to ensure it is suitable for the workplace and student environment. Once completed, depending on who the project manager is, a closure report must be written and attached to the Purchase Order (tender bid) and submitted to Financial Services for release of payment. There is no guideline in place to address proper and consistent processes for new infrastructure

projects. Implementing projects on a case by case basis may lead to confusion, breakdown in communication, and a slower response rate to addressing the infrastructure needs of staff and students.

Moving forward, there is a clear indication that the University, on a micro level, is not doing enough to address the national goals regarding disability; whether it is disability access to facilities, or learning with a disability - as a University, both should be considered. This strategy includes better aligning of the Corporate and Strategic Plans to the ESP and Samoa Development Strategy. A lack of funding will always be a persistent issue. The University through its planning unit must discover alternative means of funding infrastructure projects that do not necessarily fall under the strategic priority areas of NUS. Another issue that needs to be addressed is the current mind-set of the community; to be accepting of PWD and understanding that there are certain privileges that they are entitled to, such as but not limited to: priority parking, front row seating, accessibility to facilities etc. With the enrolment numbers of PWD set to increase, it is inevitable that the University must prepare its facilities to cater to the intake, and also meet national and sector priorities. **Acknowledgement**

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