# Questions from the participants at the **Supporting tertiary students with disabilities: Student and staff perspectives of what works webinar.**

# Answered by Dr Annie Venville and Professor Ellie Fossey

**Q: Are there any points in which the learner can be concerned with a breach of their privacy, when investigating the right way to support?**

A: Learners may be concerned about their privacy, including what information will be shared and with whom, at any stage in the process of seeking disability support. An important element of the collaboration between the learners and the learning support team/teachers/organization is to explicitly discuss a) what information a learner wishes to have shared with others (eg about his/her health condition, his/her learning needs) and b) who the learner does/does not want information shared with.

In this way, the learner is actively involved in decisions about what is shared with whom, and so concerns re privacy are likely to be lessened.

**Q: Even more so when a learner does not disclose, and it is picked up by a teacher, and how do they approach the learner safely? I have seen a learner take great offence when support was offered, or asked did they need support. The issue we have if a learner does not accept, is to covertly apply support strategies, but this is an exhausting process for the teacher, and also not equitable to other learners. Would welcome hearing how others have dealt with this.**

**Audience response to above question**

* I agree with you. I believe it's more a collaborative effort between a trainer, learning support team and organisation to maximise resources for all the learners to address LLN skills and visual, auditory and kinaesthetic needs.
* I've seen this first hand too and it's a very difficult situation if the student has an aversion to it.  Unfortunately I haven't yet worked out a successful way to deal with it, although in class we find having volunteer tutors helps along with having education access workers there who are willing to step outside their allocated students a little

**A: (from Annie and Ellie)** The scenario of a learner not disclosing, but teacher identifying an issue might occur for several different reasons - this is what makes it more challenging. For example, a learner may have his/her own strategies for dealing with an issue and so not perceive a need for support. Alternatively a learner may be in the process of becoming aware of an issue and/or may have assumed that supports are unsuitable.

A potentially useful approach is to adopt inclusive educational practices - for example, by offering all learners in a class a range of ways to do a learning activity / complete an assignment, all learners are 'supported' to select their preferred approach without singling out those learners seen as in need of support. I imagine this might be less exhausting than 'covert support', but also easier when there are additional tutors in the classroom. There are several useful resources re inclusive practices recommended in our research report and available via ADCET website

Learners need to register for disability support/learning support to be eligible for specific reasonable adjustments (ie tailored to an individual's learning support needs). So if a student/learner has sought disability support, it might be useful to clarify whether it is the type of support on offer that is the issue (eg is there another way to provide the support that might be more acceptable?). Alternatively, if a student/learner hasn’t registered for disability support/reasonable adjustments and might benefit from doing so, encouraging him/her to seek advice outside the classroom might be useful.

This is a significant issue for a number of educators- thank you for raising it. There are risks inherent in proving covert support- at best it may not be helpful and at worst may be unintentionally patronising and discriminatory. As part of our Unfinished Business study we asked students with an undisclosed mental illness if there was a “right way” for educators to approach them to offer support. The unanimous advice from our participants was:

• There is no right way. But timing (in private), authenticity (you need to be genuine) and respect matter.

• Use assertive language, Say things like “I have noticed that you are missing classes submitting late etc and I wonder if I can be of some assistance– rather than “What’s the problem?

• Comment only on the behaviours that you see- do not make interpretations or assumptions

• Don’t be offended if the offer of help is rejected the first time- it might be accepted the next time or the one after that.

• Sometimes students need to fail- this doesn’t mean they will never make it- simply that the timing is not quite right. Students spoke of the power (and pain) of learning from their failures and the lack of reward associated with a success they attributed to “too much” assistance and support from others

**Q: What electronic recording devices or apps are we able to access for notetaking?**

**A:** Students in our study spoke of using apps routinely available on mobile phones and tablets for recording, video-ing, making notes from speech.

I would tend to encourage use of these, rather than more specialist devices, given many students already have mobile phones/tablets. They can explore what apps suit them best.

**Q: How could we manage reasonable adjustments for a large scale of students studying online? Other than the strategies you have presented in your presentation today.**

**A:** I suggest looking at resources about inclusive educational practices (rather than reasonable adjustments) when you are considering what to do on a large scale, whether online or offline, so as to maximize the accessibility of teaching and learning for all learners. See recommended resources in our research report and via ADCET website.

For the web-based / online learning environment specifically, there are guidelines re accessibility (eg fonts, background colour, types of images, etc) that can be followed. ICT in your organization and/or ADCET website may be useful further resources.

**Q: Did the study check if those students who disclosed and didn’t end up completing, undertake previous study and did they not disclose then and what was their completion outcome then?**

**A:** Disclosure is made more complex for students with invisible conditions and disabilities. A further complication is often described by students engaged in vocationally oriented programs in which work integrated learning is central. Sometimes a student may be prepared to disclose to receive academic adjustments but unwilling to take the risk of disclosure in the workplace. Those of you engaged in WIL will not be at all surprised that placement is often the time that a previously managed and undisclosed condition may become more problematic for a student. This is a whole different area of work and we would love to hear of your ideas.

In our study, many interviewed students reported multiple previous attempts at studying and not completing. However we did not have the opportunity to follow up students over time so we don't know whether or not disclosure made a difference to their completion outcomes.

While access to learning support when needed might be assumed to improve completion rates, I am not aware of research that demonstrates this to be the case. This issue would be valuable to learn more about.

**Q: Any research to strengthen our position about benefits/legalities of providing transcriptions/captioned services to all online courses that is funded by academic schools, not disability services?**

**A:** I don't know of research on this issue specifically, but guidelines re accessibility of web-based / online learning materials might be useful on this point. One consideration here may be inclusiveness / diversity of end users who may benefit, for example, does transcription / captioned services to all online courses enhance access for diverse learners? (eg those from NESB, those with diverse health conditions/disabilities etc).