|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| logo_color_tif | Suite 43, Cleveland House, Cleveland 4163PO Box 265Cleveland, QLDAustralia 4163Phone +61 7 3286 3901<http://bradleyreporting.com>ABN 71908 010 981 |

DARLENE MCLENNAN: Good afternoon, or good morning, depending on where you are at.  It's Darlene McLennan here.  I am excited to be bringing you this webinar today.

Firstly, I would like to start by acknowledging that I am on Lutruwita, which is Tasmania, Aboriginal land. I acknowledge with deep respect the traditional custodians of the land, the Palawa people.  I want to pay my respect to Elders past, present and emerging. I would also like to acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal community who continue to maintain their identity, culture and Aboriginal rights throughout Lutruwita.

Thank you for joining us today.  My name is Darlene McLennan if this is the first webinar you have attended of ours.  I'm the manager of the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training, ADCET for short.

Today's webinar is supporting students with dyslexia in university.  It's come about through a research project that was taken by CQU university.  It's fantastic, this is our second webinar this month on dyslexia, as it's currently dyslexia month.  So, it's fantastic. We are really excited that we have Chris Smolder presenting this webinar today.  Chris is an associate lecturer and Academic Learning Adviser at CQU university in Cairns.

Before we make a start, we have a little bit of housekeeping for those who have not attended the webinar before.  If you need to activate your closed captions, you can go to the CC button at the bottom of the tool bar.  It could be at the top or bottom.  You can increase the number of lines appearing on that caption box by clicking on the small arrow up the top right-hand side of the caption box.  If you have any technical difficulties throughout the webinar, you can email us at admin@adcet.edu.

The presentation will run for around 40 or so minutes and then Chris is really happy to answer your questions.  We have received a couple of questions prior to the webinar and she will answer those.  We also encourage you to put the questions into either the chat pod or the question pod.  You can choose to present to all panellists or all panellists and all audience.  If you click that button where you include all of the audiences, people will see your question and can interact throughout the webinar.  It might be a question that we don't know the answer to or you want to share some great resources; it's a wonderful way to have a conversation.  So, please use the chat box for that so we get some more engagement.

I think that's about it.  Now I am going to pass over to Chris and we’ll look forward to hearing your questions throughout the Webinar. Thanks, Chris.

CHRIS MAURER-SMOLDER: No worries. Thank you, Darlene. Thank you very much, ADCET, for having me today, and thank you everyone for coming. I’m very excited to present to you about dyslexia. I think it’s really important to raise awareness.

The name of our project was Supporting Students with Dyslexia, in particular at our university, but generally in university.  It was conducted by myself, Dr. Susan Hunt, Shane Parker and Dr. Karin Stokes.

I will start with a brief definition of dyslexia.  Dyslexia affects accurate or fluent word recognition, decoding of words and spelling ability.  It's not related to intelligence or to lack of a reasonable education.  These are not the only characteristics of dyslexia, but I would say that they are the defining characteristics of dyslexia that set it apart from other learning differences.  Some of those other characteristics might include difficulty with memorisation, dysgraphia, which is handwriting, and a number of things.

Dyslexia affects around five per cent to 15 per cent of the population.  It's difficult to know the exact number.  The numbers are similar to the number of people in the world with blue eyes or the number of people in the world who are left-handed.  So, it's a fairly significant number.

People with dyslexia can and do learn how to read.  However, people with dyslexia still often or sometimes can have difficulties with things related to learning.  This comes from a survey that happened in the UK.  Students with and without dyslexia reported the things that they had difficulty with at university.  More students with dyslexia reported having difficulty with organising essays and expressing ideas with writing.  But when it came to expressing ideas orally, the numbers were a lot closer.  Still a little more difficulty for people with dyslexia, but much closer to students without dyslexia.

Our overarching question was how can we support student was characteristics of dyslexia at our university?

It was conducted in three stages.  The first stage was the self-report survey.  This was a validated survey which came from another research project. There is a references list at the end in case you are interested in seeing where that came from.

The survey was actually used to recruit participants, but we did find some interesting data from the survey as well which I will share with you today.

Interviews, we interviewed 12 students from the survey and we tried to select students with a number of characteristics.  We tried to find students who were on campus, studying primarily on campus or by distance, so around half-half.  Students in a variety of subject areas, students of various ages, and who have been at the university for different amounts of time.  We thought that was important.  Also, importantly, students with and without an assessment or diagnosis, if you will, for dyslexia.  We wanted around half with and around half without.

We also had a staff focus group.  This was comprised of all different kinds of staff at the university including staff from our disability services, staff from academic support, from our pathways program, and also lecturers from a few different areas.

The data to arise was centred around these themes.  History.  Time and effort.  Videos and lectures. Skills and assessment. Uptake of assistive technology.  I will be speaking about each of these in turn, beginning with history.

I will read this:  “Primary school, I think I failed.  I failed primary school, I failed high school, and everything, every subject I failed.”  This was an answer to the question, “Why did you take this survey?”   This was a student who didn't have an assessment, but one of his children had recently gotten one, so he was beginning to suspect that he was affected as well.

The students in our study, the great majority of them had very negative experiences in school.  These are some more examples.  “There is no point in you going to year 12, you should just leave Year 10 and go learn something or doing something or get a job.”  This is something that a student said an educator had said to them. "You won't be nothing but a check-out clerk".  These kinds of things were fairly typical of our students.  I will come back to this in a minute, why it’s important. If this feels like a segue, I will come back to that.

This came from our focus group.  They said that this person was talking about how ,when they went to support a student and that student felt that it had been discovered that maybe there was a learning difficulty there, they were very embarrassed or maybe avoided getting more help.  This is my segue.

In order to access reasonable adjustments at university, and I think anywhere in tertiary ed, you need to have a formal assessment from a medical practitioner detailing the nature of your difficulties and what kind of supports perhaps might be recommended.
Students at our university -- I’ll just speak to our university – typically, the reasonable adjustments include being able to get an extension on an assignment, being able to get extra time on exams, and not all students but many students also have access to assistive technology.  I have seen in our policy that alternative assessments are possible.  But I have not met anyone yet who has ever been given an alternative assessment.

Coming back to that history, it can have an impact. It can impact a student in several ways.  I'm only putting two here.  Number one, the history of negative experience can impact their belief in their ability to succeed.  It takes a lot of courage in the first place if you have a history of negative experiences at school to even attempt university.  It takes an awful lot of resilience to stay in university, as we will see later on, even if you don't have dyslexia.  I strongly suspect that we're losing a lot of students before we discover that they need the support.

The other one is social stigma.  It makes students feel as if they are not entitled to support, that they are asking for an unfair advantage.  They feel embarrassed asking, as you can see.  This was a student who said "I feel stupid asking for extensions ... I'm not confident approaching people to say I need to go through that again, it just makes me feel even more stupid.”  So, students are afraid to ask for help.

Another problem with the current method of supporting students, which is through disability services and allowing accommodations is this:  There has been very little awareness or understanding of dyslexia, I think generally in schools.  I think that is changing now, but many students come to university not even realising that they have dyslexia.  In some cases, they come here and realise, you know, they may have had difficulty in school when they were young and they never even heard of dyslexia or thought about those kinds of things.  They come to university and they can see that the person next to them isn't trying as hard as they are and seems to be succeeding much more easily, and they may want to get an assessment.

So, the other problem with this is the expense of getting an assessment.  The cost can be quite high.  If you live in a regional area, you may not have access to assessments.  In some places, you can get an affordable assessment, but these can take a very long time to get.  I had a student who was nearby a clinic where she could get one for free, but it took eight months for her to be seen by someone.  Those are all challenges in identifying students in the system that we have, which is teaching to a mainstream and supporting students with these accommodations, these reasonable accommodations.

You could see it in our survey that out of -- the way the survey worked was, if you scored above a certain threshold, it was suspected that you had characteristics of dyslexia.  I can't say a person had dyslexia, but they scored in a similar way to people who did have dyslexia.

67 students who took our survey scored above this threshold.  Now, of these 67 students, two thirds did not have an assessment or diagnosis for dyslexia.  There is a pie chart on the screen.  You can see that 67 per cent of those students did not have an assessment.  That 67 is a coincidence, by the way, the number of students and also the percentage of that number that didn't have an assessment.

What I would like to say here is, potentially, those students were not receiving reasonable accommodations.  It's quite likely they weren't, for dyslexia, anyway.

Another study that was conducted in Australia found that of 994 students who did have an assessment for a condition that would challenge -- a challenge at university -- 633 of them had not disclosed their difficulties to the university.  These are students who actually already had an assessment and they are still not disclosing to the university.

One of the reasons cited in this paper was stigma.  One of the reasons for not disclosing.  There were many, but one of the important ones was stigma, avoidance of it.

What I'm getting at, and really one of my main points that I would like to make today, is that we can't know who has dyslexia.  We can't know for sure.  We do know people do have dyslexia.  We do know.  There are a number of people who do have dyslexia and so, if we're being inclusive, we should be trying to design our curriculum so that it suits as many people as possible.

I would argue that this means best practice in teaching, not catering to people with disabilities, it means best practice.  If we teach well, we should be able to teach a wider audience.  This idea is based on an idea from architecture called universal design.  This is from architecture now.  “The design of products and environments to be usable by all people, to the greatest extent possible, without the need for adaption or specialised design.”

In other words, we now build our buildings so they have wheelchair access regardless of who is working at that building or who we anticipate is going to work at that building.  We anticipate that there's a segment of our population that will need this, and so we design our buildings with that in mind.

Universal design in learning is a similar concept.  So, we should be designing our curriculum, not for a mainstream and then trying to support people who don't learn that way, we should be trying to design our curriculum to suit as many people as possible.

There's a website and I have included it in my references list, called CAST.  They outline three major parts of universal design in learning.  I will address a few that I think are important at university.

So, presenting information in a variety of formats.  I will come to this some more in my presentation. Allowing for variety and choose of expression.  I will come to this again as well, and I'm especially talking about assessment. Allowing all students access to assistive technology.  This idea came from someone at my university named Natalie Vonthien.  I said, “Wouldn't it be wonderful if we had a site licence and anyone who wanted to use text readers and so on could access that?”  I will talk about that too towards the end of my presentation.

Another recommendation would be to develop a strengths-based self-report survey to help identify students that may require additional support.  By this, I mean asking people about their learning styles, what things they are concerned with, and if they are concerned with certain things, that we try to refer them and give them support early on so they are being supported.  We don't need to know, we don’t need to label anything.  We just need to say, “Okay, you are having trouble with writing, you find writing to be difficult, let's address that.  Let's refer you to be an academic adviser who can sit down and help with you that.”

A third thing, which I think is very important, is finding a way to provide low cost assessments to students.  That's as far as my recommendation goes.  I don't know what the magical answer is to making this happen is. I do feel it's an equity issue that students who need reasonable accommodations have to go through this additional expense and worry.

A second significant theme to come out of our research was time and effort.  I have to say, this is what prompted me to do the research in the first place.  One of my roles at the university is Academic Adviser.  I have a number of students who seem to have learning difficulties, or at least they are having difficulties with learning.  They put so much time and effort in, you just want to really see them have a fair go and find out the best way that you can support those students.

This comes from one of the students in our study who said that he was studying 12 hours a day for two units.  These were two graduate units, this was a graduate student. Another full-time undergraduate student who said that she was studying 70 hours per week.

So, as you can see, it's all consuming.  It really is something that someone with dyslexia or someone who knows that they are going to have difficulties, they prepare like a marathon, they prepare ahead of time and they really put every effort into completing to the standard that they hope to complete to.

This isn’t from dyslexia research, this is just looking at, generally, university students.  At the University of Western Sydney, it was found that lecturers and students differed in their estimations by sometimes more than 400 per cent of how long it would take to complete a certain assessment type.

For example, lecturers believed that an success say should take around 10 hours.  That was their fair estimation.  Students felt it was taking them 40 hours.  These are not students with dyslexia.

So, what appears to me to be happening in some units is that students actually do have more than the recommended 12 hours.  So, I need to backtrack a little there.  At our university, we say that each unit that you take, each class you take should take you around 12 hours of study time per week.  That includes everything.  That includes going to your lectures, your tutorials, doing your readings, doing your assessments, study.

So, one of our recommendations is to really have a good look and look at some research perhaps and determine if we really are asking students to do a maximum of 12 hours per week.  In that, we should be including assessment.  That brings me to my next point.

One of the students was talking very passionately about how much she loved -- sorry, I'm moving ahead of myself.  This is another student.  She said she wished there was something official like a marking rubric, that when you open it up, it's the same document.  It says font and then you know what font you’re supposed to have. She said she had to chase up two or three or four different assignment documents to find out how she was supposed to just format her assignments.  She is just talking about formatting.

A common problem that we seem to find was that students were having to waste time trying to find out what the formatting requirements were for an assignment, trying to find where their assessment was on the page, or where all of the information that they needed for an assessment was on the page.  Here, I'm talking about Moodle, which is an online learning platform where your course is set up virtually.

One of our recommendations is that organisation and requirements should be consistent within a course.  There is other research, of course, that suggests this.  Again, this is best practice.  We're not asking anyone to do anything unusual.  We're just saying let's look at our courses and make sure we're doing everything sensibly and consistently across a course.

I have a little graphic there for Moodle. The Moodle pages for each unit should be the same.  The assessment block should be in same place.  The formatting requirements should be the same and they should be in the same place.  This will make it easier for everyone.

Another theme - videos and lectures.  This student said, “Being able to go and review lectures and watch them in my own time has been really beneficial for me because I find I can pause and think about something and then go back to it...when have you dyslexia, it takes sometimes a while for information to process and sink in.”

I put up these quotes verbatim and sometimes there are little grammar things in there.  I'm not sure if that was from the transcription, but I'm hesitant to change it.

The students really valued videos.  In past research, one of the things to come up frequently as a difficulty for students with dyslexia was note taking, because students used to have to watch a live lecture and take notes in real time, which is a very difficult thing because you are doing a number of things, you have a number of balls in the air. One of them is paying attention, decoding the language that you hear or that you see and then forming it into words and writing it on the page and at the same time trying to get again what has just been said, which is a difficult thing.  Videos are a wonderful thing because students can watch it again and again.  They can pause and they can take notes if they want to.

The other reason is, some students find it easier to understand information that is presented to them verbally than they do when it's in written form.  Videos are very important and we really should be making them a priority.

Another study -- I would say a similar study, but mine is actually similar to theirs – by MacCullagh, Bosanquet and Badcock found that students actively searched for videos on the internet to help them understand their course content.  These were videos that weren’t included in their course, but because they were having difficulty understanding a concept, they saw the video in order to help them understand it better. Students in my study did this as well.

To go back to universal design, we should be designing our courses so that we are presenting things in multiple formats.  So, presenting things in written form. Next to that, we should be presenting the same content, not different content, the same content in video form.

A recommendation to come out of this is best practice in video production.  By this, I don't mean beautifully polished transitions and music and that kind of thing.  There is research that says what works best in an educational context.  One of the things -- and there is a study at the end, I believe the author is Gall -- they looked at massive online learning courses.  Millions of sessions.  They found that, from videos that went anywhere from three minutes to 40 minutes in length, the meantime for watching a video was six minutes.  One of the very, very resounding messages of the study was short, short and sweet. Six minutes was the recommended amount of time.  I would even say, too, something that is planned, something that has a beginning, a middle and an end. Something that is very clear and easy for students to understand.

Another problem that students said that they had was that the videos that they did get were recorded lectures.  And, a lot of times, the quality of this wasn't good for a number of reasons, one being it's not interactive, but also the lecturer was speaking to a lecture hall. Sometimes, they were very, very long. Sometimes their speech was not very emphatic or interesting, and they didn't give examples.  There were a lot of complaints around that, especially because the videos were so important to those students.

The other recommendation, because interaction was so important to the students, is video conferencing, using video conferencing instead of recorded classroom lectures.  It's a platform like this. In fact, this is Zoom, I believe. It’s a slightly different format than I'm used to, but lecturers can call upon students and take questions from students.  Students can send questions in the chat and they can send them anonymously to their lecturers if they want to and then hear the answers.  That is something that would really benefit our students.

Skills and assessment are obviously a really big thing.  Assessment has been shown to determine students' learning, really.  It's what drives the students' learning because the assessment is the important thing.  It's the thing that we're going to focus our attention on.

One of the things we found is our students had an awful lot of writing.  This student -- this was her first year. I don't think it was her first term, but this was her first year.  She had five essays in that term.  She said it was definitely not without a huge struggle and 100 different drafts.  She felt this was very difficult for her.

On the other hand, this student, who also had a lot of written assignments, he was talking about how well he did in presentations and he said, "That's where I got my really high marks, 100 per cent in one case - absolutely unbelievable at a university getting a high mark like that.”  Imagine the lift this gave him and the boost to self-confidence and how wonderful to be able to present his understanding of the content of the course in a different way.

More importantly, I would say that this helps students be able to engage more with the learning of their unit.  This student said, “...apart from the length lectures that I try to see every week, all of the material they want us to read, I'm not even touching the edges because I'm trying to focus on doing these assessments.”  The student felt that working on the assessments, because it was so important in the way she was going to get her grade, she didn't have time to look at the course content, which is unfortunate because it's the opposite really of what you want.

This is a pretty famous cartoon.  It says, “For a fair selection, everybody has to take the same exam: Please climb that tree.” I'm not saying that essays don't have their place at university, and we will come back to essays in a minute.  What I'm saying is that everybody should be given the opportunity to demonstrate their learning in other ways as well.  So, we need to not over rely on certain kinds of assessment just because that's the way it always has been done.

One of the quotes to come out of our focus group was one of the advisers said that she has heard people say that if you can't write an essay, you shouldn't be at university, which is heart breaking to hear. That's not true. So, we should be giving students the opportunity, other opportunities.

This was from a study, an extensive study on inclusive assessment that took place in the UK.  It was a survey asking students to choose their preferred types of assessment.  There was a list of 44 different types of assessment to choose from. It's interesting that students with and without dyslexia both chose -- as their top 2 -- continuous assessment and course work with discussion.

Interestingly also, both of these -- and I think it's Gibbs, which is in the references list -- looks at conditions which support learning, conditions of assessment which support learning.  Both of these kinds of assessments allow for copious amounts of feedback.  There was one more thing I wanted to say about that, but it's escaping me right now.
Also, they require a more even distribution of students' time over the course of the term, which has also been found to promote learning and retention, rather than a single exam at the end which a students often leave until the end to study for.

Another interesting thing, and probably not surprising, is that students with dyslexia did not choose in their top 7 essays assignments. So, it's inequitable that almost every assessment or so many assessments are essays.

These are some problems with over-reliance on a single type of assessment.  Again, I want to stress "over-reliance".  Number one, they are not always authentic.  An essay is not something that most people will typically be doing in their target profession.

They don't encourage learning of other important skills.  So, if we're just doing essays and we're not doing other things, we're not teaching students how to work in groups, we're not teaching students how to do oral presentations, which is also very important in a lot of industries.

They are not always the most effective way to encourage learning, as we saw just previously.
And they are not always valid in that they require a disproportionate amount of time on skills that may not be the central skills of the unit, or just a disproportionate amount of time on those skills.

Returning to that study, I mentioned about inclusive assessment. Waterfield and West, this is a successful example of providing choice to students. They took an engineering course which traditionally had written examinations and they offered students a choice.  They were allowed to choose from either module tests, course work, portfolio or weekly summative tests.  They would choose at the beginning of the term, and I think they had a period of our four or five weeks where they could change their chosen assessment type.

Initially, there were concerns about equity, and it is something that you have to think about when you are designing this and making sure that it is fair, that if you take one you're not advantaged. They did consult professional bodies and also the equivalent of course coordinators.  They saw this as an issue, but they felt that they had resolved any issues.

The findings were this, that additional resources were needed to develop and mark assessments.  However, no special accommodations were requested.  There was a significant reduction in the number of lowest grades.  There was a significant increase in the number of grades above 60 per cent.  And both students and staff were happy with the result, were happy with the trial.

This is an example of actually not just variety, but providing choice to students, so that everybody can choose the way that suits them best to show what it is that they have learned in the course. Out of that, variety and choice and assessment.

This was the one I started to talk about much earlier.  “I love templates.  I love them, and they help me a lot.”  Here, she was saying, “Just when they are really clear,” she was talking about the templating being clear, but then she was talking about her lectures. "I feel like they say it's not a trick question, but I feel like it is.”  She went on to say that they say, “Just answer the question.”  She would say, “I just answered the question, and then they said, ‘No, but we wanted you to say this.’” She said, “That wasn't just answering the question.”  It was quite funny, the way she was expressing herself there.

It was a common problem for our students trying to understand what was required of them; trying to understand the task, trying to understand what everyone what everyone was looking for.  I would argue that this is not just a problem for students with dyslexia, this is a common problem for a lot of the students that I see.  They are new to essay writing or they have not done it in a long time.

Once again, I am going to just step away from dyslexia for a minute and point out the completion rates for certain equity groups in Australia.  I want to especially focus on this first, age 25 and over.

Over a period of nine years, 41.6 per cent of students over the age of 25 do not complete their degree in nine years.  They start their degree, and after nine years, they still have not finished it. I can only speculate, but I would like to imagine now that I'm a 25 year old student, I have not been to school in a long time.  Maybe I wasn't great at school to begin with, and I'm now going to university.

And I need to write, which is quite typical, two essays and they are due in week 6.
In that time, I have to learn how to use the library and conduct research.  How to evaluate sources for credibility and for usefulness.  How to read a journal article in jargon that I may not yet be familiar with.  I have to learn how to note take and paraphrase, which are quite complex skills.  Write an outline.  Write a paragraph or essay.  Organise those ideas.  Know that I need a thesis statement, a topic sentence, et cetera.  Write in a formal academic style, which I may not have been exposed to before.  And learn how to reference.

These are all very challenging skills.  A student needs to learn all of these skills by week 6 and present the knowledge that they have learned in this form.

So, my recommendation is borrowed from some other study.  I want to say it's Gibbs, but I believe it's Gill and others. We should be teaching students essay writings, if we feel that we want our graduates to be able to write an essay before we leave. Instead of just using this as an assessment type, we actually have to teach them how to do this.  I would say that we should spread this over the course of their degree.  It could be over the course of two years, but slowly step them through the process.  Give them the opportunity to learn other content in the course as well.

I just want to return to the idea of universal assessment before I continue.  This is just good practice.  This is not just for students with dyslexia; it will help students with dyslexia. It will help a whole range of students including so many of those ones that we saw previously here.

Finally, I would like to talk about the uptake of assistive technology.
Just assistive technology being software or even hardware that can help a student in their learning.  Things like dictation software or text-reading software.

It has been found that assistive technologies can really help students with learning difficulties.  This will help them in their learning and with their self-confidence, hopefully with their retention.

I did ask all of the students if they have used the assistive technology.  Here is a typical answer.  This student said -- I asked if he had ever used a text reader.  He said, “Dragon does text to speech, which I never used, which would have made things easier.”  I asked the question, why did you never use it.  He says, “I never got there.  I got to Dragon late in the piece, as I was starting mid-course.  I realised it would take me some time to learn how to use speech to text.”

So, he felt he needed some training and some time to get used to the software before he could actually use it in his studies, which took so much of his time.

Out of the 12 students we interviewed, only one was using assistive technology.  Two other students had access to the software, but they weren't using it because they didn't feel comfortable using it. None of the other students that we interviewed had access or, in many cases actually, ever heard of assistive technology, ever heard there was such a thing that could help them.

Again this comes from a colleague:  Site licences for software should be purchased by institutions so that all students can have access.  To return back to the beginning, remember, we don't know who has dyslexia.  We don't know who is having difficulties in their learning.  Many people could probably benefit from this kind of technology.  Why not just make it available to everyone at the university instead of going through the lengthy process of getting licences for individuals?

Training in software should be made readily available to everyone so they can use the software, and we should be trying to do it as soon as we can. That's all I had to say about that.

But I'm not done yet, wait.  How long have I gone, Darlene?  I wasn't checking the time.  I am just going sum up quickly.  Recommendations for lecturers. Universal design, which includes some of these things.  A maximum 12 hours of weekly content.  Consistent course-wide organisation and requirements.  Best practice in video production. Interactive over just individual recordings. Variety and choice in assessment.  And explicit course-wide teaching of assessment skills.  I just have one more.

For the Institution. Site licences for software.  Training in software.  And developing a strengths-based self-report survey to help identify students that may require additional support.

I realise I have gone longer than I thought I would.  Here, I'm not just talking about support from services like disability services but also support from academic learning advisers and counselling because many of these students also have issues with self-esteem and anxiety. Also, some of these students have ADHD as well. Two of the students in my study found it extremely helpful to meet with counsellors who helped them to budget their time, helped them learn how to manage their time, not just their time at school, but their time outside of school as well.

Finally, find a way to provide low cost assessments to students.  Darlene, I think that's all I have there.

DARLENE MCLENNAN: Sorry to cut in.  I was in the middle of answering a question online and I kind of stopped following along.  I do apologise.  Thank you for that, that's fantastic.  Just for people, if you have got any questions for Chris, please feel free to write them in the chat pod and I will ask them.

We did get a few questions prior to the webinar which you have kind of answered some of those throughout your webinar.  One that we did get was around assessment.  Luke has asked:  Do you think that further assessments are needed for students if they have an assessment when they are a child?

CHRIS SMOLDER: It's not up to me, unfortunately.  I am not sure what is required of everyone, but I know that some departments at least require that you get a more up to date assessment.

DARLENE MCLENNAN:  So, we sought an answer a couple of years ago around this as practitioners in the sector.  Our advice was, yes, if it was done prior to the person reaching 16 years of age, then a reassessment would need to be done.  There is lots of information.  I will give a plug while we're waiting for some more questions to come through of our Opening All Options on ADCET.  It’s adcet.edu.au/oao. There is a heap of information there in regard to specific learning disabilities which include guidelines to assessment.  We will give you some more information around why the recommendation is to have that reassessment done at that age.

You did speak in your presentation around identifying students with dyslexia.  Is there any other information that you think is important for people, especially teachers that are joining us today, around how they can identify dyslexia in the classroom?

CHRIS SMOLDER:  Someone did ask that question.  I would say it's different for different age groups.  I also have two children who are dyslexic. I'm not an expert in primary education or anything like that.  But, to me, for primary education, if a child is not reading when everyone else is reading, to be suspicious.  There are other signs as well.  For example, one of my sons had speech problems.  He is also a little bit dyspraxic, which means he is not as coordinated perhaps as others.  Different signs.  But if someone is not reading when everyone else is, I would say be vigilant and make sure that they are getting the intensive phonemic instruction that they will need in order to learn how to read.

If it's an older child, I would say that unexpected misspellings is really a big one.  It sounds very obvious and like a no-brainer.  I'm trying to think of an example . I had a student here --and this is also true for higher ed -- who was using a comparative form.  I wish I could remember the word, a word that ends like brighter, smarter. He was using that for a verb, which is an action word, like to do something.  If I read it to him, he could hear.  His English was very grammatical.  He could hear the mistake, but he just didn't see the mistake on paper.

That kind of thing is a trigger.  But, really, if someone is having substantial difficulty with their study, then they need support.  You want to investigate what difficulties they have and try to address those.

DARLENE MCLENNAN: There was a question that came in before the webinar as well around font and if you recommend particular font.  We at ADCET for this month have put the dyslexic font on ADCET so people can check it out there.  You can turn it off and on.  For this month, it is there permanently for the month.  What are your thoughts in regard to fonts, Chris?

CHRIS SMOLDER:  It's the same, really.  For all of my materials now, the research shows that Sans Serif fonts like Helvetica and Arial are good fonts.  Comic Sans is a good font. We should be avoiding italics and all caps and things like that.

The Round Table meets every year.  It's an organisation that meets every year, trying to find best practice in presenting print forms.  I have provided a link for that.  People can go have a look at what is recommended there.

The person asked if I thought that dyslexi font was a gimmick or something.  I wouldn't say that, no.  I say, if you suspect that someone has dyslexia, or you know someone has dyslexia, try everything and see what works for them.  If that is something that works for them, then we should be trying to provide it for them.  But on the whole, I will use Sans Serif fonts which have been found in studies to be very accessible for people with a number of print disabilities.

DARLENE MCLENNAN: Excellent. I have had a question online.  Students are required to do assignments on a computer, but then are required to do a three-hour written exam.  Many students have difficulty to write as fast as they can type and are not fit to write for three hours either.  How do you see we address this problem?

CHRIS SMOLDERS: I see that we should be accommodating them.  It's unfortunate that in order to do that, they will have to have an assessment at most institutions.  But we should be -- why?  Why does it have to be handwritten?  There is no reason for that.

DARLENE MCLENNAN: I think majority of -- I know definitely in the further education sector, if people have, you know, provided documentation around their specific learning disability, then the adjustment would be in place that they can use computers.  I know there is still often a fight with the qualifications authorities around Australia of actually getting that adjustment put in at exam time.  It just seems quite frustrating.

I have had a person online put a call to arms around why specific learning disabilities cannot be part of Medicare to look at a diagnosis, which is great.  I mean, you know, it might be something that we as a sector can start to argue for.  Because it's one of the limitations we really find for people coming to the universities and TAFEs, especially that either they have come without a recent diagnosis, a recent assessment, and it's a really expensive venture, or they have come and finally actually realise they do have dyslexia and another specific learning disability and then having to source that assessment. It’s just is inhibiting for them to get the adjustments they need in their studies, which is limiting them.

CHRIS SMOLDER: I agree.  It's extraordinarily frustrating.  It's something that really bothers me.  That's one of the reasons why stuff like this is fabulous.  I think awareness needs to be raised.  A lot of people consider dyslexia to be a myth, or just don't know anything about it.  So, it has not been on the radar.  In schools -- at least in the literature I have read -- it has been described as being put together with other difficulties with literacy.  In a way, this is inclusive, in a way, not.  So, this is all about that labelling controversy.  But students with English as a second language or with cognitive difficulties and dyslexia are all in the same category, or used to be.

DARLENE MCLENNAN: Just two more questions that we had prior.  There was one around apps and software.  We have a lot of information on ADCET.  I am just going ask Jane if she could put the link to where people can find out the different technologies and apps that are available for people with specific learning disabilities in the chat for everybody.

There was a question that just came online, I have not read it.  Given how prevalent dyslexia may be, what could universities do to help these students transition out into the graduate labour market?  You mentioned the time effort if proportioned for essays and writing assessments.  Transition out often requires learning specialised written genres such as selection criteria is applying for many jobs.  Any hints in that one, Chris?  It's a great question.

CHRIS SMOLDER:  Well, I mean, assistive technology could be the answer there as well.  If we could teach people to not only get university, but become competent in doing these things possibly through assistive technology, hopefully, that could help them in the job market in their future professions as well.  Is that answering the question? Sorry,  I didn't see it.  Are you there?

DARLENE MCLENNAN: I have deleted myself.  Between my coughs and my drinks, I’m getting confused with myself. It was more in regards to supporting students who are looking for work and having to communicate.  Certainly, technology could assist in that.

CHRIS SMOLDER: Hopefully, what we're doing is preparing them for that profession.  And if we are putting those students in mind and we are supporting those students, then that's what we're doing.

DARLENE MCLENNAN: I think it's good practice.  I'm sure lots of students in their studies have had a friend or family member do some of the checking for them.  I would really encourage any students to actually also use the careers service.  Often, the careers service within the university will -- if you explain the situation, that you have done the selection criteria but due to the specific learning disabilities, you are wondering if you are using the right terminology and so forth.  Hopefully, they would take on that as something they could do.

CHRIS SMOLDER: That's another referral that I would actually suggest.  I'm sorry, I don't remember the name of the person who did it, but someone did do a presentation on ADCET about referring students to careers advisers to talk about what their strengths are when choosing what to study at university in the first place.  That is someone I think it's useful to refer people to as well.

DARLENE MCLENNAN: The last question was around the PhD students, if they meet the academic requirements.  Was there anything over and above what you presented on today for that student cohort?

CHRIS SMOLDER: Perhaps not.  We did interview a PhD student in our study and her frustration was that, while there are some supports in place for undergraduates, it's virtually unheard of, she felt, in the research degree.  She did an honours/masters and also her PhD and she was really having advocate for herself.  Complicating that issue was the fact she did not have an assessment for dyslexia and didn't feel she should have to get one, actually.  What she wanted at that level was proof reading.  She wanted, I suppose, funding to be able to have her work proof read.  It was determined that she was going to have to get an assessment in order to have that conversation.

For those students, I would say proof reading is helpful.  Assistive technology, definitely.  I do think you need training in it to see if it's going to work for you in the first place, and one on one support where desired.

DARLENE MCLENNAN: Another quick question because we are running out of time was if you knew of any video banks that students could go to. You know how you said one of the student strategies was around trying to find short videos to explain content and so forth.  Are there any video banks that you know of besides YouTube?

CHRIS SMOLDER:  That's a good question.

DARLENE MCLENNAN:  It is, isn't it.

CHRIS SMOLDER: Well, I do know a few students mentioned Kahn Academy.  Probably everyone know about those.  There was one other maths one that somebody told me about. I forget the name of, I’m sorry.

DARLENE MCLENNA:   We might be able to put it up into the webinar afterwards if you remember it.  We will put it on our page.  That will be fine.

CHRIS SMOLDER:  Sure. I don't really have anything special, unfortunately.

DARLENE MCLENNAN:  No, but it's another thing that I think we will add to ADCET as recommendations for academics because they probably have those too.  They could make it easier for students by saying these aren’t essential, but you can go here, here and here to increase people's capacity to understand the topic.  All right.

CHRIS SMOLDER:  I would stress saying when it's essential and when it's nonessential.  That was another one of the final recommendations to come out of our report, was that, sometimes, people are trying to be helpful and they put heaps of content on there and then they don't distinguish between what is necessary and what isn't, and it can be quite overwhelming.

DARLENE MCLENNAN:  Very overwhelming, yes. Good call.  I was thinking that as I was saying it, thinking I know that would overwhelm me.  We have reached the end of our time.  Thank you so much, Chris. It was a really informative webinar.  With your research, have you got a date?  At the moment, it's not released, is it?

CHRIS SMOLDER: No.  It has to go through a bit of a process.  Hopefully, within a month or so, I should be able to allow people to read that report, I hope.  But there is other writing planned as well.

DARLENE MCLENNAN: Excellent. If we can at that time, we will certainly put it up on ADCET and promote it widely.  Just a reminder that we have a webinar coming up. I have probably gone off that now, sorry about that.  Our next webinar is next month and it's in partnership with the National Centre.  The title of that is Beyond Graduation: Long-term socioeconomic outcomes amongst equity students.  That's our next webinar which is coming up on the 6th of November.  Also, talking about the Round Table, we have a webinar coming up presented from some of the outcomes of the Round Table.  That will be later in November, but we will send the information out and promote it widely when that comes up.

That's it.  Thank you, Chris, for your time.  That was absolutely brilliant.  Thank you, everybody, for joining us.  Have a great day.

CHRIS SMOLDER:  Thanks.  ​