DARLENE MCLENNAN: We've been very fortunate. We've got some fabulous people joining us today. We've got Brandon Taylor, who is the Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy Manager for TAFE in Queensland; Sheena Cranwell, who is also from TAFE Queensland, who is the Accessibility Service Officer; and Stephen Manson, who is the Manager of the Disability Service - sorry, Stephen, I didn't actually grab the title of your team, from TAFE SA. Very unfortunately, Linda Glover, who is a Disability Liaison Officer for TAFE Tasmania, has come down sick and is an apology. Today, we are providing closed captions or captioning for you and also Auslan interpreting. So please, if you need to pin your interpreter, do so and you can access the closed captions in the CC button at the bottom of your screen. We're going to wing this session a little bit today. Brandon is only with us for a very short time, but we thought Brandon for a very short time was good enough, because we'd rather have him than not have him. He's going to join us. I'll ask a few questions. We were very fortunate to receive a lot of questions in registrations, so we'll ask those, but at times we want to either go to the chat or ask people to put their mic’s on if they're comfortable to do that and ask questions, just so the session does become a little bit more interactive. We will see how it goes. I might hand over quickly to each of our panellists just to give you a little bit of an overview of their role and a little bit of history of themselves. I might start with you Brandon first.

BRANDON TAYLOR: Thanks, Darlene, thank you very much and good afternoon everybody. So, I'm Brandon, I'm currently the Manager of Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy for TAFE Queensland, but prior to that for many, many years was the Student Support Manager looking after the Disability Counselling, Indigenous and International Student support. Prior to that, was a Disability Officer for many years in TAFE Queensland and in the same system in the UK and a teacher specifically of students with disadvantage and disabilities in the college system over there.

DARLENE: Brilliant, thank you. Now over to you, Stephen.

STEPHEN MANSON: Thanks, Darlene, and hi, everyone. I'm Stephen Manson, I manage the Student Services at TAFE SA. I've been at TAFE in the VET sector for about five years and prior to that, I worked for many years in the university sector at UniSA managing their Access and Inclusion Services and for a time, the Counselling Services there, as well. And worked in the disability sector for a number of years. A social worker by training and yeah, enjoying what I do and happy to be here with you guys today.

DARLENE: Great, thank you Stephen. And Sheena. You're on mute still.

SHEENA CRANWELL: Sorry about that. Hi, everyone. My name is Sheena. I've been working with TAFE Queensland as an Accessibility Officer for over five years now. I guess I also have a background in Social Work and have worked in student support in the university sector, as well. I also have lived experience and experience as a career of a mum of a child with a disability. I'm quite passionate about inclusiveness in training and education.

DARLENE: Thank you all for that. We're going to kick off with a question for Brandon, as he's going to leave us soon, so we thought we'd give him a curly one to begin with and make him work for his money that he's not getting. So, Brandon, why is access and inclusion important in the VET sector?

BRANDON: Thank you, Darlene. What a great question to start with. I think the one thing that I say to people to answer that question is quite simply this, here we are in 2021, access and inclusion is still important simply because the Disability Discrimination Act itself is nearly 30 years old. The Disability Standards for Education nearly 20 years. Despite improvements, despite significant increases in awareness of different disabilities and impacts on students in the VET sector, sadly the statistics still tell us that the employment rates for people in Australia with disability are still significantly below those of people without disability. If we dig a little deeper into that, we need to look at what the options and the choices are and this is where the VET sector really, really does have a part to play. So, for me, the importance of access and inclusion is quite simply about ensuring that people have choices and they have options, just as anybody else would have because that enables empowerment at a very individual level and it's a very powerful opportunity that ourselves as disability practitioners, but also as VET educators, actually play and we might not realise these wonderful opportunities in education and training that we can provide. So, for me, that's really why access and inclusion is important and that's the angle that I take.

DARLENE: Brilliant, thank you for that. Anybody else want to add anything, or move on? Feel free to add any questions or thoughts into the chat box. We do want to make this session as interactive as possible. Feel free to give a shout out to your other colleagues or confirm what the speaker said or argue back with what we say or ask questions. Really happy to be interactive and if people are comfortable, we'll ask people to turn their mic on and ask questions at different points, as well. For the next question that was given is around our practice as disability practitioners and the question was: What are the main principles of practice? Stephen, I might throw to you for this one.

STEPHEN: I'll try and unmute myself.

DARLENE: Good.

STEPHEN: Here we go. I achieved that. The principles of practice, I'd probably start for new practitioners, well why might it be important? For me, having principles that you kind of fall back to when you're working in a role where you're very often dealing with things you've never dealt with before. You know, every scenario, every student is a bit different, every kind of combination of student, individual student with different types of disabilities doing different sorts of courses, it is a role where part of the joy, I think in it, is you're dealing always with different sorts of situations. Probably to avoid being seen as being a factory for creating access plans, you really kind of need to have some principles that you can sort of fall back on to help with the problem solving, the decision‑making, sort of just guiding your practice. Probably one of the first ones I would lean to is a student‑centred approach. We hear that kind of bandied around a fair bit, but what does that mean in practice? Probably for me it's kind of listening, being interested in the stories of our students and listening and actually taking on board what we're hearing from our students and that can manifest in lots of different ways. So, both at an individual level with the students that you're working with, but also when you're thinking about the systems that you work in and how do we make sure that students are providing some voice in the decision‑making that goes on around the place and the processes and the services that we deliver that we're attentive to what students are telling us to about what works and what doesn't and what they want us to do. That's probably my sort of starting point is a student‑centred. I think within our context, a life cycle, kind of student life cycle approach, as well. Bearing in mind what the student journey looks like, from the decision‑making about maybe applying for a course, maybe sometimes gathering up the resources and the courage to actually apply and enrol. What can be an overwhelming process of getting orientated and getting started and then sort of moving into the process of developing skills and knowledge acquiring, learning and being assessed which can be quite confronting. And then true to that journey that Brandon mentioned around completing and looking for work, and I think looking at that life cycle approach, how does that help us? One of the things it identifies is that there are points of risk for students with disability on that journey. Particularly for me, you're sort of thinking about front‑ending stuff a little bit. How do we make sure we don't lose students early on when they're dealing with the challenge of transition? Establishing those sorts of supports early, building trust and connection and explaining where we fit within the system and the sort of role that we can play and how we can be an ally for our students in navigating what can be complex systems.

DARLENE: Brilliant.

STEPHEN: Shall I go on? There's a couple more.

DARLENE: Go for it!

STEPHEN: There's a grab bag, I think. And this is for every practitioner to think, what are the things you lean to? Bear in mind, you can see the wood for the trees, that you've got something that you fall back to that guides your practice a bit. To a degree, a case management approach, so thinking about assessment processes, intervention, how do we kind of then review that practice and ensure that we're managing that kind of interaction and engagement intervention with our students effectively. A rights‑based kind of approach, so what does that kind of talk to us about? Things like valuing the ethics and the rights to education and the inclusivity and equity in what we do. Probably also valuing and thinking about universal design, so minimising the need for interventions where we can so that we're actually looking at the systems that we're working with and trying to maximise participation of our students through that. So, rather than just providing adjustments and trying to make students fit into a system that's not quite right, that as practitioners we're thinking about, how do we make this system as much as possible work for everybody? I think it’s worth having a look at the WHO disability model and that mix of a medical and social model. So, both attending to the fact that we've got, our students have a range of disability‑related things that go on, but there is also a context that is super important and that social model and also, the psychological aspects of what's going on for our students. So that biopsychosocial model of disability I think as well.

DARLENE: That's brilliant! You've brought up a range of topics there. If you are new to the sector and actually haven't come from the disability area, I really encourage you to look up the different models of disability that Stephen spoke about then. Because often the challenge for us is that many of us in our practice support the social, or the human rights framework or model, but we actually are very much based on the medical model in some ways, because we do require prove people to prove their disability often through a medical diagnosis. So how do we work or marry those two things together, is a question we often ask ourselves as practitioners. I'm going to pose the question: what other principles do you think are important? If people wanted to add in the chat box, that would be great. Feel no pressure to do that, because I know I can't do two things at once very well. We did talk about ‑ Brandon you first raised the issue around the legal framework and you talked about the disability standards in education... am I missing the other one? The DDA. I'm getting caught up. So, the DDA. They're the two most significant legal frameworks, but why are they important? Why is it important for us to understand what the legal framework is? Brandon, did you want to answer that?

BRANDON: Yeah, look, absolutely. I think for any new practitioner for this space, you've really got to be confident in your knowledge of what those disability standards are and the good thing is that if you look on‑line there is frankly a very clean, quick, brief guide and it's as much about understanding that it isn't just about teaching delivery and reasonable adjustments, it's actually about access to information about courses, which then comes back to people having choice and being able to make informed choices. The Disability Standards as well, they do make it explicit and incredibly clear what our obligations are as entities and organisations in the VET sector. As much as disability officers and services, our own areas are important, it's not actually just for us. We're a point of contact for students and staff, but the responsibility for applying the Disability Standards as a norm in everyday teaching, access, delivery services, whatever it may be, that responsibility sits with the organisation as a whole, with every educator. Before I disappear, because I do have to leave shortly, I just wanted to say look, Stephen mentioned as well about communication. Your networks in communication, this is what I would say to new practitioners, are absolutely vital. You've got local and national networks as practitioners with other practitioners. But please, please make the time to get to know your teachers, your trainers and your educators at your organisations, because practitioners, VET teachers on the whole, are absolutely invested in their students. They more often than not practice reasonable adjustment whether they realise it's reasonable adjustment or not, because it is the notion of the nature of the vocational sector. It's a partnership, it’s a collaboration and it's about as much being a support and a consultation service to educators as it is as much about students. And it's about helping to empower the educators as much, as well. I could say so much, Darlene.

DARLENE: I know, it's such a shame that you have to leave us. But yeah, no, I think you've raised an important part. Often, we do think that it is that one‑on‑one with students, the developing learning access plans and so forth or accessibility plans, but it is that broader picture too, of ensuring that the educators or teachers we're working with are aware of the responsibilities and that they're teaching is as inclusive as possible. So, I've framed another question in the chat: Do your educators know about their responsibilities under the disability standards and education? It would be great to hear if people feel like their teachers or educators in their institution are aware of that. Do you need to leave us Brandon?

BRANDON: I'm sorry, but I do. I'd love to stay. Thank you very much and my leaving message will simply be this ‑ you're not on your own. No disability practitioner is expected to be an expert on every situation, on every scenario and there are networks that you can lean on, which include all of us and many of the very experienced people and you can guarantee that someone else has walked through a scenario or a situation before you. There's a lot of experience and knowledge out there to share and as practitioners, we tend to be very good at sharing in this space.

DARLENE: Great, thank you, and I hope the day goes well for you.

BRANDON: Thank you very much guys, take care.

DARLENE: Has anybody got any questions that they want to ask before I ask the next one? Feel free to put your hand up.

SHEENA: I was just going to ask ‑ Darlene, it's Sheena here. When we're looking at that legal framework, just something that I find is quite important is to remember what our student's legal right is around disclosure and whether they want to disclose to their training organisation, as well. We sort of have some policies that we work around that the student has to approach our service about disclosure of our service or registering with our service, because it's their right and their information. So, that's something I guess around those legal frameworks that I practice to, anyway.

DARLENE: Stephen, does TAFE SA have a similar approach?

STEPHEN: Yeah well, I think it's certainly an interesting space, that kind of competing tension between being really careful with the private information that students provide us when they're developing access plans, but at the same time, allowing a good sort of flow of information and transfer of information to lecturers that aligns with what the student's perceptions and expectations around that are. There are some tensions in there that most institutions can struggle with a little bit at times. I know that at TAFE SA we've been pondering some of these issues and thinking about if there are better ways that we can both maintain student’s privacy and confidentiality of information, but also make sure that lecturers that need to be aware of stuff to support our students, that they do have good access to that sort of information.

DARLENE: Yep, and there is a number of tensions or points that kind of work like that and I suppose that is a lovely segue into the next question is: What is reasonable when making reasonable adjustment? That's often as a new practitioner for us that have been in the sector for a while, we kind of think we know it, but at times are often challenged with that question. So, Stephen or Sheena, who wants to start to answer that one, or begin to answer? Are you right, Sheena?

SHEENA: Yeah, it's defining "reasonable". Our work is very grey. Our work is very grey. I guess with all of our programs there is not a set line of what is reasonable for that specific area. Sometimes it's up to negotiation. I guess for myself, I consider when someone comes to me with a request, I've had several requests for students to be able to zoom into a classroom that's been delivered on‑line, which sounds like a reasonable thing for myself. But then there's a whole lot of other things that are there. That's a tricky one. I know that Brandon has done some webinars with our teaching staff on that, because it's something that we face on a daily basis. I always have to go to the faculties and talk to them around when I don't know about the specific things relating to a subject area or a course, because I'm not a course content expert. That's what I always say to my student, "I'm not a course content expert. We're going to have to look at what the course delivery plan is and how it fits into the criteria to what we can work around that. A simple one is delivery of, if the student can't deliver a talk to a class of 30 students because of anxiety, a background of anxiety or social anxiety, talking with the faculty around presenting in front of three students. But then I've got a program that will identify it must be done in front of ten students. There's always to and froes and I don't know Stephen, you've probably got something a bit more to add?

STEPHEN: Well, yeah, no, I agree Sheena. ‘Reasonable’ is an intentionally vague word, I think, in the legislation. I guess I fall back a bit to the disability standards as well, because we do know a bit about what's not reasonable and we know it's not reasonable not to respond to a student's request for reasonable adjustments. We know that you need to respond in a timely manner. We know that you need to give reasons. So these are the things we've been working through with the academics, as access and inclusion advisers it's not our role to necessarily unpack the training package and to make decisions about what's reasonable within the context of the particular training package. But I think our role is to support the academics or the lecturers to kind of do that and understand what their obligations are within that space and so, I think as long as we're engaging positively with lecturers and students around that process and making sure that yeah, that we're kind of communicating with students about their request and that it's being dealt with in a timely way and that there's reasonableness to the decisions that are made about adjustments that have been requested. So that you can't just say "no, you can't do that" and not have any basis for it. If there's a reason that an adjustment can't be provided that relates to the core competencies in a training package, then we're looking for alternatives. If there are reasons that relate to resourcing that are just too great, that's always a dodgy area, but if there are resourcing issues that are being seen as a challenge and we're explicit about that, the student always has a fallback, they can make a complaint if they need to, if they feel that the decision has not been a fair one. And transparency around that process and communication and helping the lecturers to understand what their obligations are, I think, is at the core of that one.

DARLENE: No, it's a brilliant way to see it. I kind of feel like we should be doing a "word‑all" or something at the same time, putting all the skills down of what we need as practitioners. I mean, I think one of those that's pivotal is that key negotiation, I mean we need to be good communicators but also that ability to negotiate a situation about what is reasonable. For those who haven't engaged in the disability standards in education review that happened last year there have been some recommendations made in that around trying to unpack a little bit more about what reasonable is. I don't know how far we'll come with that, but it's an interesting document if people want to have a read of it. Sheena, did you want to say something else?

SHEENA: I was just going to say how, again, we're coming back to that circle of making connections with the teaching teams and it's almost like a circle of support that's in our practice. We're looking at working with the teaching team, the faculties to actually come up and identify what is reasonable and things like that. We're just always communicating and building those relationships for the outcomes.

STEPHEN: I'd just add briefly ‑ without going on about it in that context ‑ it is important for new practitioners in the VET space to have a look at training packages, have a look at actual wording about competencies and the way the training packages are set up and just familiarise yourself. You're not going to read every training package, but get a sense of how they're structured and how you can source that information where you need to and also the implementation guides that sit alongside those training packages, because they do include some wording around reasonable adjustments and support that's specific to the particular ... well, sort of specific and sort of not to the training packages and probably worth just noting in that space there is some work that's happening at the moment I believe or kicking off to try and improve the inclusivity of the training packages and be a bit more clear about what they're not using wording and what‑not in the packages that's unnecessarily exclusionary.

SHEENA: And just a really quick thing, sitting in the classroom, being there while they're doing the task sometimes as a practitioner, if you have a chance in between meetings with your students, being there is a really good thing. Popping into the class and sort of seeing what's happening in there, the delivery and so forth can be really helpful.

DARLENE: Great, thank you. That was actually the next question around the training package compliance and ensuring reasonable adjustments. It is, as Stephen said and Sheena, it's really important that disability practitioners get their head around training packages, cause it is one of the unique things around your role as disability practitioners in the VET sector versus the higher education sector. So, it's the one of the reasons we separated out the sessions today, was so that we could unpack the difference in the roles. The next question was: What makes a good learning plan or access plan? Or, how do you prepare a good one? Is there any thoughts on that? I was kind of feeling guilty with only the two of you!

SHEENA: And it's funny, isn't it, because you get asked that and it's probably something that... we have a platform that we use at TAFE Queensland. We have a template that we do up. It's for me as a practitioner. It's really important that I only disclose what my student feels comfortable with disclosing on that. For me it's something that has directly, the student has directly been involved with. What challenges they want to disclose, what strengths they want to disclose and that they're sort of fully aware of the reasonable adjustments and things like that, that we're looking at. For myself, it's coming back to what Stephen was saying about being very student‑centric and getting them to be actually involved and happy with that information. They're giving informed consent for you to distribute that. It's the next thing is that it's going to be easy for the teachers to read, for myself. Knowing that it's been delivered; that the information that they need, say, for exam adjustments and things are easily read. That's why we've adjusted recently our template here at TAFE Queensland to apply some of those for easier access.

DARLENE: Stephen?

STEPHEN: I agree with all of the above, Sheena and I think trying to avoid just being an access plan factory that kind of just comes out with standards. The templates are great, because they can make things easier and give students some ideas and examples of the sorts of things that they can use. But I think both from a student point of view and from the lecturer's point of view, if it starts to feel like we're just filling in a form that doesn't kind of speak to the individual and their circumstances at all, then it starts to lose a bit of its purpose, I think. As a tool for the student, as a way of helping them with that kind of disclosure or that process of negotiating adjustments and just keeping to the purpose of what it's actually for. Sometimes, I think, we get lecturers who either want more information about more detail or they want to know more about the student's actual medical condition. So being able to explain and be clear about the purpose of the access plan and how it is a tool for the student to help to negotiate reasonable adjustments and support.

DARLENE: That's good.

SHEENA: On the other hand, you may get a student ‑ I have students that really want me to disclose that they have a medical condition or that there registered with the service ‑ their disclosure is just they want their teachers to know they have something impacting their studies and these are the suggested reasonable adjustments. I sign off on that and then I will most likely get a message back from the teacher, "Can you please explain?" But at that time, I don't have permission to, so there's one of the little challenges involved there. But that's their choice, that's the student's choice and their right.

DARLENE: I might have a little advertisement break here. Just on ADCET, so for people that hopefully... all the new practitioners here are aware of ADCET. We've broken that into three main areas which is Disability Practitioner, Students with Disability and Educators or Academic area. But under that, we've actually broken down disability and the adjustments that people would expect in their learning and their study and in each of those areas. That's a really good tool for students, if they haven't ‑ often at school they're not involved in these discussions before getting to the post‑secondary education sector and may not have unpacked what their needs are before. It may be a really good tool to help them unpack, which would be great. Before I ask a next question, is there any questions from the audience at this stage? If you want to put your hand up or put it into the chat box. Feel free to chat in the chat box. I feel like ‑ we had a couple ‑ but there's a one‑way conversation here, but hopefully you're just so busy listening to our fantastic speakers. Ok the next question is... when we were meeting, we were talking about this, that your role within the VET sector is really broad and diverse. You're often having to work... some of you may work for VET in schools or for schools. You may be working across foundation courses right up to diploma level and working across the apprenticeship and traineeships area. We thought we'd unpack, what are some of the tips to help practitioners navigate that broad area to kind of what we said "hit the road running"? Stephen, what are some of the tips that you could give a new practitioner here?

STEPHEN: Thanks, Darlene. It's a bit of a tough question, because it is such a broad role. I think just bearing in mind the principles of practice that you're working to and we do work with different cohorts. There are different issues for school students that have got a school in the mix. We might be working in close collaboration with a school around providing support for a school‑enrolled student. This space kind of varies a bit from State to State, as how it operates. You need to get your head around the mechanics of what's happening in your own State and your own organisation. We've got quite a lot of change happening at the school space at a kind of government level and so needing to kind of keep abreast of what's happening in that space and how we work in collaboration with the schools and the sort of relationship and information that we need to share with schools to be able to effectively provide training to school students. So, it's kind of a different dynamic and slightly different scenario. It's not dissimilar ... well, schools also obviously you're working primarily with students that are under the age of 18 and so there's some different issues there as well around the role of parents and the experiences of school students generally not having been active partners in negotiating or planning supports. So, we need to be really mindful of where the school student sort of sits in that access plan development process. Because they haven't normally actually had a voice or an expectation of having to be involved in that process at all. Apprentices and trainees there are other issues, because there's an employer in the mix as well and the way that delivery occurs is different and if they're doing block placements. Some of this varies a bit from State to State, but I guess as a practitioner being aware of and finding out about how those processes work. Things like the Doors Program, which provides Commonwealth funding for apprentices and trainees with disability and how the mechanics of engaging with that funding and those services for apprentices and trainees. For me, it speaks to the need to be able to be a bit of a sleuth. If you don't already have existing type processes in your organisation for understanding and unpacking those differences, you sometimes need to be able to be prepared to investigate and to make connections and with the schools, you may have some key partner schools that you work with and connecting up with the VET coordinators or the disability practitioners in the school environment and having working relationships happening with them as well. So, yeah.

DARLENE: We mightn't have got you to hit the ground running, we may have you running for the hills with how complicated the role is. Hopefully it hasn't scared any of you off. There's a whole language around it, as well. It's a lot to learn and take on in your first couple of months of the role. Sheena, was there anything you wanted to add? No pressure, too.

SHEENA: I just wanted to say it is totally normal to feel completely overwhelmed. In the first year, maybe two years, look across ... it is exactly what Stephen said. You become a detective. You have a student turn up for a Certificate III level and you see that they actually need to get some more underlying skills. Then you walk over to another building and you find someone in the C program delivering a lower‑level course with those base skills. So, you are literally on the ground moving around finding out what you can as a detective. Whether it's on‑line, phone, feet, definitely. It's normal to feel overwhelmed, but somebody around you will know something about it. Our admin staff are amazing. Ring them up, ask more about the programs. Definitely normal to feel overwhelmed in that first spot.

DARLENE: Staying with you Sheena ‑ and we've talked about the need to be a good detective and other things ‑ what other advice would you give for people starting out in the role?

SHEENA: The other day when we had a little bit of a conversation before doing this forum today, it was brought up, as a practitioner you're thinking, "Okay, so what if I have a student who requires Auslan interpreting and so forth, but I don't know anything about Auslan interpreting?" Until you actually get a student who requires those services, hold off on that. Concentrate on who's coming through the door, who your students are, listening to what they're saying to you and working with that student. For me, recognising that each student is unique, no matter what their diagnosis is. The challenges, the reasonable adjustments that they're going to need are going to be different. How you frame things is going to be something, as well. Using your writing skills, I think, is something. I use my writing skills a lot, because I just find that my writing skills are better sometimes than my verbal interaction. So, I use those skills. Use those skills you have to create those links. Like I sort of mentioned before, I try to create a circle of support for my students so that they feel connected. The main thing for your students is once they connect with you, that might be their first time that they've started working with somebody at TAFE and you're that connection to connect them to the other supports for them to access the learning. Definitely listening with the students, being really proactive and start building so you gain that circle of support for your student so they feel that connectedness to their studies and their course.

DARLENE: Excellent, thank you. We talked quite a lot about the student‑centric model, or the student at the centre, and we also touched a little bit about the importance of your relationship with educators and teachers and informing them of their responsibilities and roles around inclusive teaching and around the disability standards in education and so forth. Have you got any hints or tricks on how to develop relationships with the academic educators or teachers within your organisation? Stephen, I might go to you first in that one.

STEPHEN: Thanks, Darlene. Well, yeah, probably we mostly all work in such large organisations that using the channels that are there and kind of thinking about how you can sort of use them constructively. For instance, we have a principal lecturer’s network that has all of the principal lecturers from across TAFE and often there's 100‑plus involved and they meet pretty much every week pretty much so getting a Guernsey to speak to them from time to time, and I think most institutions have some newsletter that goes out to lecturers and so getting information into those channels. We've actually got a quality area which does the teaching and learning practice. We've been working really quite closely. We've actually recently got a great person who's a friend of Darlene's ‑ Jen Cousins ‑ whose job is actually around inclusive education within that quality education space. We work really closely with her around getting to lecturers through running workshops and the like and collaborating in that sort of space and developing those partnerships is, I think, really important. As well as the individual stuff like when you're connecting with lecturers and seen as being kind of a help in dealing with stuff that they haven't actually dealt with before and we might not have dealt with before, but we try to approach with a bit of confidence and the lecturers, I think, as Brandon noted earlier, they're 99% they're really kind of committed and in the right space in those engagements. Just working collaboratively with them and that does build relationships over time and then you become that sort of go‑to person when they have another scenario that they haven't dealt with before and they're looking for someone that can give them help with it, so.

DARLENE: Sheena?

SHEENA: I think for me it's I always remind the teaching staff that I'm on their team, as well. We're here to have good outcomes for our students to come up with a plan that's going to work for them. That's something that I involve them and remind them that I'm not the discrimination police or I sometimes feel like "don't shoot the messenger" on this one. We're all on the same team. I guess recognise for myself as a practitioner, recognising that I'm working inside a tertiary academic environment, working with students with a disability. I'm not working in a community service, I'm actually working in a training organisation, so sometimes me connecting that helps me with those interactions with them, as well. I'll invite teachers along to meet students if I have quite a complex student who has... we're going to have to make some quite significant reasonable adjustments to the program. Having the teacher come along to the meeting, meet with the student before they start. The teachers will often ask them some questions and come out and they'll say, "I'm so glad I met with your student, because I can see why they're doing the course and their goals are there", so involving them in some of that process, the intake process and those discussions with the students makes them feel like part of the team, as well.

DARLENE: That's really important. Thank you for that. Talking about Jen Cousins, Jen and another colleague in Queensland, Meredith, developed a resource in consultation with other TAFE providers around the country that provides information around access plans for VET educators for you to share with VET educators. I've put that link into the chat now if people haven't come across that resource. It may be another good thing to share with your educator/teacher/academics depending on your organisation. So the other thing which I suppose is unique often to the role, actually probably not, because in the Higher Education you still have industry placements, what role do disability practitioners play in industry placements, from your experience? Stephen, what role have the practitioners played?

STEPHEN: I have to call out that it's a number of years since I've been involved in actually developing an access plan so I lean heavily to my access and inclusion advisers and counsellors here to help navigate this stuff, so I'll be very brief. Placements are super important, obviously and not really different from basically the whole practical kind of learning context where students are actually doing stuff when they're in class, as well, in the trade areas and the like. The role that we play as an organisation in making sure that those things are inclusive and being prepared to problem solve and listen and find out what the issues are, because there might be issues around occupational health and safety. There might be issues around equipment that are difficult to resolve. There might be some research that's needed. I know we had a scenario that I wasn't directly involved in, but I know it was interesting in working with a screen and media area where there were sets that needed to be set up and there's a wheelchair‑using student that had to sort of navigate this quite tricky environment and it was around collaboration and just making sure that there was good communication and the student was really awesome in being actively involved in what the adaptations kind of were going to look like. Yeah, I think it's an interesting space and obviously one that's super important, because it plays a massive role in that next step in terms of transitioning from training to employment which is what the whole gig's about really.

DARLENE: Brilliant.

SHEENA: I guess one of the roles I've sort of taken Darlene when I've worked with students who've been going on placement, most of the area that I've worked in is in the teacher aide space. So, education support. That involves a lot of standing, playground duties, things like that. For some of our students who may have some physical challenges, standing for half an hour is not going to be something they're going to be able to do. A lot of the times I'm working with the vocational team to come up with a plan for that student. It may be that they may need to do half days, so have an extended period of time. Normally the vocation may run over a certain set amount of time and it's expected for them to finish within a 6‑month period, but for some students that's not going to be something they're going to be able to do because of the small amounts of time of their physical abilities there. So, just negotiating to come up with something that's going to be accessible for the student and providing the team with the reasoning why this is a reasonable adjustment for that student. We're not actually trying to be unreasonable in some of those spaces. So, yeah, just providing education and information to help support their decisions there, with the requirements.

DARLENE: Brilliant. Why this question might be a big question probably to be asked when we haven't got many minutes left, but the role between supporting a student's needs and the creating dependency, it's often one of those tension points of trying not to do too much for the student, but also knowing that because maybe the impact of their disability they may need extra support to succeed. What are some of the strategies or things to think about when you're a new practitioner around your kind of relationship with the students? Stephen, did you want to answer, or Sheena?

SHEENA: I will. I guess one of the things, when we have a student starting off, our main aim is to make the environment as accessible for the student to participate and engage in their learning at that time. Then I guess one of the things that I work with them is building their study skills. If they've got a pathway journey ‑ and I think we talked about a journey earlier on ‑ building those academic skills so they can actually become more independent on that. We have some study coaching and things like that on our campuses here at TAFE Queensland. But what they're working towards is the study skills, so the student can become a more independent learner rather than... we wouldn't take away the resources they need to access the environment. It's more about their skill set and building their competency and their academic skills. That's sort of where I...

DARLENE: Brilliant. We've had a question come in around, how do you develop the knowledge and skills or the expertise that's required for the role? There was a question around qualifications, but at the moment it's pretty much on the job. We don't have any formal qualification for the role, but there are very diverse people as I think Sheena has said, she has a social work background. We know many people have an occupational therapist background; people come from teaching backgrounds. So, it's a range of backgrounds and I certainly want to look at something in the future where we can actually have some post‑grad qualifications for disability practitioners. I think that would be a very powerful thing, but hopefully ADCET can provide you with a lot more information, but also a session like this can also inform you and upskill you. The final question is: Have you got suggestions on where to find information or useful resources for people in their role? Just kind of in a minute or two, so Stephen, I might start with you.

STEPHEN: I just concur, Darlene. You can't go past ADCET.

DARLENE: I'll pay you later!

STEPHEN: Yeah, yeah. But also, I'd say use the AustEd-list. It's reasonably quiet these days just in terms of people using AustEd-list as a spot to put questions out to the sector and I think from a VET sector point of view, it could ramp up and be used more. If you've got a question about a particular scenario, it's rare that you'll find there's no kind of response from the sector to provide some advice and feedback on it, even if it's just a matter of pointing you to a resource. There are some really good international resources, as well. I know some of the UK resources are quite neat around universal design and just in the access and inclusion space. Most people start to develop their own collection of resources both internally within your own institution and looking a little bit more broadly to the sector. I think as Brandon noted, just building your own little networks and having people that you know you can go to and you can check in with. I know I always had a few assistive tech people that I knew in different spots that were good for different types of tech questions to refer to. It is a role where you are necessarily a bit of a jack of all trades, but not an expert on all the things you're dealing with by any means and not expected to be.

DARLENE: Excellent. Sheena, any final word for you in that? Sorry, you're on mute.

SHEENA: Sorry, clicking the wrong button! Yes, your networks. Whether it's internal in your organisation, someone else who's in the same role as you, in your State, in Australia. Also, connect with, talk to your students about who their support services are. So, their support service might be Deaf Services. They can provide you with a whole heap of information. Connecting with external organisations can be really helpful and try and get on any free webinars that you can, because that is where you can get some of the best training from the practitioners who are out there at the moment working in specific areas. Definitely link in wherever you can.

DARLENE: Excellent. All right, only one or two ones I got to add, it’s Jane's just put in our newsletter link so people who aren't a subscriber to the ADCET newsletter you can subscribe there. For new practitioners that haven't heard of the Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability (ATEND), that's our peak professional body for disability practitioners across the tertiary sector. I encourage you all to become a member of that organisation. Also, they have State chapters you can join and connect with others. Before we finish, we spoke about Brandon doing a presentation around reasonable adjustments and unpacking what's reasonable. He's provided us with that slide show. It is probably more Queensland‑focused, but there is some really great gems in there to help you unpack reasonable adjustments. We'll share that with everybody on here today. We will also put the video up and other information on our website so you can come back and refer to it at any time. Coming to an end. Thank you, Sheena and Stephen. It's absolutely brilliant. It was great to have the conversation with you. I hope it's been of value to everybody here today. It's fantastic to see so many of you on‑line. I'd like to thank Karen and Ali for our Auslan interpreting and Tina for our captioning. We've hit the 2 o'clock mark. Thank you everybody, and have a great day.

SHEENA: Great, thank you.

STEPHEN: Thanks, everyone. Good luck.