DARLENE MCLENNAN: Thank you for joining us today. For those who don't know me, I'm Darlene McLennan and I'm the manager of the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training, ADCET for short. Today, we're providing live captioning and 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 also have captions available via a browser - we will put that link into the chat now. I acknowledge that I'm coming to you from Lutruwita, Tasmanian Aboriginal land, sea and waterways, and acknowledge, with deep respect, the traditional custodians of this land, the Palawa people. I invite you to put into the chat box the lands on which you are coming from today. I stand for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspective, culture, language and history, and a continued effort to fight for Aboriginal justice and rights, paving for a strong future. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional custodians on the various lands on which you're adding to the chat box now in which you are working and any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who are participating in this webinar. We're going to make you work a little hard in this session. We're going to be encouraging you to write in the chat box and we're also now just going to start with a poll. So, Jayne will put up the poll, we’re asking people the question: How long have you been in your role? Three months or less, six months, one year, two years, or forever? That one’s probably from Jayne, we were having a laugh prior to this, but Jayne has been in the role forever. We might end that now, Jayne. We've got 56% of people online who have been here for three months or less, 13% six months, 6% one year and 25% forever. I take that as most of our speakers today. Thank you for that. With our webinar today, we are really very fortunate and excited to have three very experienced disability practitioners. I'm not saying old, I'm saying experienced, joining us today. We have Jayne Ayliffe, who is the Access and Inclusion Advisor at the University of South Australia, Tracey Nelson, Disability Liaison Officer from Deakin University, and Mirela Suciu, who is the Manager of Student Accessibility and Wellbeing at the University of New England. What a wealth of knowledge and passion that we have in the room for them to share with us. Just a few more housekeeping details. This meeting is going to be recorded and we will make the recording available on ADCET in the coming days. If you have any difficulties, any technical difficulty, please email us at admin@adcet.edu.au. We want to make it as interactive as possible. We will be encouraging people to ask questions if they would like to by putting their camera and their microphone on or you can ask questions in the chat and I will ask our panellists. I will also be asking some questions for you to answer in the chat as well throughout just to try to make sure that we actually do keep the interactivity going. Let's start. I will just share the results of the poll. There we go. The first question we wanted to ask our panellists is: Why is access and inclusion important in our university environment? I might throw over to you, Jayne, first to talk about that.

JAYNE AYLIFFE: Thanks, Darlene. I think, ultimately, we have a legal obligation and there is a question later on about legislation, so we do have a legal obligation, but it's actually a human right and we have a moral obligation to promote dignity and respect for everybody who has an opportunity to participate in all aspects of life. I see our services as about empowering and supporting students to achieve what their academic potential and goals are, particularly in university life. I also think it is important because I think visibility of disability within the higher education is important to inform students and staff about disability and also how they may respond as future practitioners in their own careers and hopefully they will be inclusive practitioners as well.

DARLENE: Brilliant. Mirela, did you want to add anything to that?

MIRELA SUCIU: Basically, obviously, the same reasons, and also I feel that people with different lived experiences bring different skills and perspectives to both studies and future career and just looking at the percentage of people with a lived experience of any type of disability, this is just an essential component of everyone participating in society, and once they enter the workplace, it is good for them to already have a better awareness and acknowledgment of everyone, diversity.

DARLENE: Brilliant. The next one, we will talk about the legal framework in which we work in. I'm going to pose a question to the audience: What motivated you to become a disability practitioner or advisor or liaison officer, whatever name that is provided, or accessibility officer - what has motivated you, one or two words in the chat box, to take that role on? Thinking about the conversation that Jayne and Mirela just provided us with is that we have that moral and ethical and cultural kind of reasons that disability and access to university is really important, but there is also the legal requirement that universities are as accessible as possible and that they are open and available to people with disability, the same as other people without disability, but what is the legal framework that we work in. Mirela, I might throw over to you first for that.

MIRELA: When you apply for the positions — we have had the Disability Discrimination Act since 1992 and on top of that, we have the Disability Standards for Education that have been around since 2005. That set the basis for why our positions have been established in order to support students in enabling them to participate at university on the same basis as all other students. We also are working under the tertiary education qualification standards, agency standards, whatever they are, and they have several provisions, some that are specifically targeted at students from diverse backgrounds, not just with disabilities, but anyone from diverse backgrounds, and also general equity and information sharing that is accessible to everyone. Each university, as far as I know, most organisations have their own Act that they need to comply with, and then we've also got the accreditation requirements of the various disciplines. In particular, those professional degrees such as medicine, law, psychology, social work. They have their own legislation requirements in order for the degree to be an accredited degree for the university and for the students to become accredited practitioners of whatever they're studying. So, there's several layers of legal requirements that we need to be at least aware of.

JAYNE: I think different states have different requirements. In South Australia, there is the EO legislation as well that impacts and, of course, as you said, different institutions have different policies, like harassment, student disability policy, and multiple institutions have their own disability action plans as well that needs to be adhered to.

DARLENE: I will just post in the chat the guided notes around diversity and equity. Sometimes people are not aware of those guided notes that exist and they're useful to support you in advocating in your university because it is something that universities really adhere to, to test the guidelines. In the chat box when we've asked the question, “What's motivated you?” Some of the answers are a new challenge, to help others, experience as a social worker and raising children with disability, I wanted to learn new skills, to assist university students gain access to the studies, experience as an OT helping facilitate clinical placements for students with additional needs, someone fell into it at first, but loved helping others and making an impact, somebody else said they also fell into the role, but have a keen interest in the mental health space and helping others and loving this new space one month in, and finally, an opportunity to draw on students' experience to increase awareness and understanding of disability in relation to equitable education. So, fantastic. What a great sector this is. I've been in the sector now for 16 years and coming from the health and community sector, I found the tertiary sector mind blowing of the generosity and the enthusiasm and passion from each and every disability practitioner across Australia. One of the big questions that I think as a practitioner is often around your learning access plans, and so we just thought we would cover off a little bit of how you prepare a good learning plan. It is often hard, that word “good”. We weren't sure whether to put that in the question, but I might throw to you, Jayne, what are some of the tips or tricks around developing a good learning access plan?

JAYNE: I think the biggest thing is listening to what the students' needs are because often their experience in education and other areas has been that they haven't been listened to or taken seriously or believed, so that's one of the key things, is to listen to the student, develop an understanding of how their condition impacts on them because someone's experience of a learning disability is different to another's, so it’s making sure you are individualising for that specific person. It also is important to understand what program you're going into, program courses, whatever you want to call it, because that informs the chosen area of study because having an understanding of that can guide you as a practitioner to know what might need to be included or considered in their plan. For example, if it's just class-based work or whether it's an online environment, whether there is quizzes, placement, whether there is lab work. So, that sort of informs placements as well, informs what you might include in an access plan. To be honest with you, access plans are just words on a piece of paper and it's actually what you do with the plan that I think is actually the critical thing in terms of the students understanding what the access plan is about, how to use the access plan and to be honest with you, in my experience, it is the actual communication between the student and the academic staff that is critical in the whole process, in developing the access plan and putting that in place for the student to support their learning.

DARLENE: Excellent. Tracey, was there anything that you wanted to add to that at all?

TRACEY NELSON: Yes, thanks, Darlene. I think, as Jayne said, there's a lot of opportunity in the access plan to focus on all the different elements of the student's course. What I try to do in an access plan is to convey the student as a human being, as a person, rather than just as a student, but also, like Jayne said, it is a very effective communication vehicle between the student and the academic who is going to be reading it. So, for the student, it is a way of clarifying what is in the access plan because they will refer to that access plan time and time again. So, it's making sure that it is very clear in the plan what adjustments have been put in place for them, but also an opportunity to explain to the academic what the student needs as well. So, it's a very simple tool, but a very valuable tool to convey so much important information about a student's needs to the relevant people who are going to be teaching the student.

DARLENE: Great. For the audience, please feel free to put up your hand at any time and I can go to you if you want to ask a question, or ask a question in the chat box and I will also ask from there. I'm just going post a link in the chat to our page around access plans - it gives advice around access plans. I'm sure most of you are aware of ADCET, but sometimes it can be quite daunting going on the website and finding everything you need, so I will put a couple of links throughout our session today to help you go directly to the source of the information.

JAYNE: I think the other thing is that students might have just developed their disability, or come from high school and it’s a very different way of disclosing so just making sure that students are … at that and so plans aren't set in concrete and they can be changed as their condition might change or their experience might change, or they come across something that they didn't think would impact them and it does, so it's making sure they’re aware of that and that it is not set in concrete and it can be changed.

TRACEY: Absolutely, I agree. It's a living document and it should be reviewed on a regular basis because the type of assessments might change over time and the students' needs might change over time as well, absolutely.

DARLENE: Yes, definitely. The million dollar question of the sector is: What is reasonable when making reasonable adjustments? And Tracey very bravely put her name down for this question.

TRACEY: Did I?

DARLENE: It is one of the things that can, as a new practitioner — my first time in the sector, accommodation was probably used more than adjustments and I couldn't work out why we kept talking about beds at the university, so both words are used, accommodations and adjustments, so what is reasonable when making a reasonable adjustment?

TRACEY: That is absolutely the million dollar question and it is one that you never stop learning. I think that's the important thing to realise is you never stop learning. We are told that a reasonable adjustment is a measure or group of measures implemented by an education provider to assist the student with a disability to apply, enrol and participate in their course on the same basis as a student without disability, but the specifics are going to come down very much to the nature of the disability, the supporting documentation that the student has provided, the students' lived experience, plus your knowledge of the university, policies and processes and the type of assessments that the student is going to deal with. Part of the reasonable adjustments, it's a moveable feast. Again, it can be quite dynamic, but I focus on what are the barriers that the student experiences and then what adjustments can we put in place to mitigate or eliminate those barriers. For example, a reasonable adjustment might be that a student needs extra time in a timed assessment or they might need access to some form of assistive technology or documents in a different format. So, it comes down to what is reasonable for the student, what the student is going to be able to use in a way that makes sense to them and in a way that makes sense for the type of course that they're doing, the type of assessment that they're doing. For politicians, it might be something like the pub test. What is a reasonable person going to think would be suitable for that student, and this is sometimes where the conflict can come in between your view and the academic's view as well and what is reasonable under the circumstances, but the good news, if you are struggling with what is reasonable, is that there is a wealth of knowledge out there within the ADCET community, but it's all about problem solving and working in partnership with the academics, and the reasonable part of it is generally quite easy to figure out. There might not be a pro-forma that you can follow, but in discussion with the student, it is generally — my experience has been it is quite easy to find that reasonableness in the reasonable adjustment or the educational adjustment. Has any of my colleagues got anything more to add to that?

MIRELA: Yes. I just wanted to add that in my experience, reasonableness also changes over time, so what may not have been reasonable five years ago is totally reasonable now - online exams. They were a big hurdle a while ago, but now we're all doing it because we had to start doing them last year. Accreditation requirements, they changed, also as a result of last year, but they changed anyway because they're being reviewed. Technological changes, so what students can access free of charge. There is so much more assistive technology now than when I started in the role that is built into our everyday systems. That makes it a lot easier for them to just use it rather than having to purchase and get approval for particular technologies. Then, obviously, changes in unit and course outcomes, changes in the university's position, and also, technology. Our university, we are looking at investing a heap in new systems for learning management, for student engagement, all sorts. That changes, again, what we can provide without needing to make further adjustments and what makes — or what adjustments then become reasonable because they are just a lot easier to implement.

TRACEY: Absolutely. I think the inclusive education focus has meant that many of the baseline adjustments are no longer needed and hopefully, we get to a point in the future where most of the adjustments are simply in place already, as Mirela said, we have seen a huge move from, “It's not possible to do online exams,” to, “Absolutely, we can do online exams,” and Deakin automatically gives everyone who has an online timed assessment an additional 50% of test time to accommodate dodgy internet, barking dogs, screaming kids, the usual. So, we've gone from, “That is entirely not possible,” to, “This is the norm now,” and hopefully we continue seeing that move forward.

JAYNE: I think one of the things that is part of the legislation is that it's also not to give them a significant advantage over other students, so it's on equal footing. As I say to students, you still need to do the work with some adjustments to support you, so that what the aim is, they might not feel that the university wants to know what you know to be successful and … exactly like numbers, but I do tell them that we do get judged on our reviews at the end of each course and sometimes I have students come to say they need an extension for a week for all assessment. I think being too proscriptive in access plans actually can be not to the student's advantage and that's why I talk about they may have difficulties with oral presentations because it depends on what the presentation is. A lot of presentations are all online and spoken to a PowerPoint rather than physically standing in front of a group of people, so I think it's being, what you said there, Tracey, about being adaptable and things have changed as well, but I think we need to remember that some of the academic reasonable adjustments, the decision rests with the academic, it is not us making that decision and so our role then is two-fold, to support the student and also to support the academic and acknowledge what would be considered reasonable under the legislation and whether we, as a university, the decision we're making … at risk of being taken in front of the Human Rights Commission. We often get told about registration bodies and what they will and won't do and making sure that some of the adjustments are outside of the university’s power because of the impacts of registration.

MIRELA: It's a reasonableness to everyone and that's where our work, I feel, is a lot in, in negotiating with the student to understand them and their needs, and then also with the lecturers to make sure that what we recommend doesn't contravene their requirements.

DARLENE: I'm just going to post in the chat now the section on ADCET around reasonable adjustments. We have been able to — what we've done is actually put down specific adjustments for disability types. That may help you as a practitioner to unpack if you're working with a student who is blind or deaf, what are some of the reasonable adjustments that may be expected in that place, but as our presenters today have said, it is very individualised. This just helps you and supports you in your practice. Before we go on to the next question, we would like to ask you what do you think will be the biggest challenge in this role. I will post that question into the chat box for people to just write down the challenges. We've talked around the access plans, unpacking reasonable adjustments, but what are some of the other challenges that you might think or have experienced starting out in the sector? With that, our next question is around lecturers and academics and working with them and building a relationship. We talked about working with them to unpack what might be reasonable in a course or a unit, but often it is the relationships that we have with lecturers and academics that can bring about the success for students with disabilities. Tracey, have you got any suggestions on developing and building a relationship?

TRACEY: Yes. I actually work from home full time, so it's very difficult for me to have in-person appointments with academics, so a lot of the relationship building that I do is over the phone and via email and I'm sure that's probably true for many of my colleagues out there as well. When I first start working with an academic that I don't know, I make sure I introduce myself and tell them who I am in relation to that student and I also see that - I mentioned this before - I think we're a partnership. So, the academic and the DLO are working together, should be working together, to ensure that the student is able to reach their academic goals. And it shouldn't be an adversarial relationship. Sometimes it is, but if you start out on the premise that you are problem solving a particular situation together and that there is always a solution, then the relationship works. I have been really lucky. I haven't had a situation where a relationship with an academic has gone so far south that there is no recovery, and I think it is also important that you're honest in all your dealings, both with students and academics, but if you don't know an answer to a question the academic has, say, "I don't know, but I will find out,” the same as you would with the student. You don't need to be the expert in everything, but if you make them realise that you're coming from a place of wanting to help the student, wanting to help the academic and working together to bring those parties together, you shouldn't go too far wrong. What's my colleagues' experiences?

DARLENE: I suppose the next question was if they are resistant lecturers. You’ve developed a relationship, but sometimes they are a diverse bunch. I think for many years ago, the lecturer was probably quite aloof or seen as aloof as the expert and stood up in a lecture theatre and spoke about all their knowledge and then went off and hid in their office again. These days, academics are probably a different breed, but you still get one or two academics that kind of feel like you're giving a student an advantage by giving them reasonable adjustments or they may not want to put that reasonable adjustment, so what are the tips and tricks to deal with academics who may challenge your suggestion? Jayne, have you got any suggestions?

JAYNE: I think what Tracey was talking about is establishing that individual relationship with academics which I think is really important because, obviously, we work with some more than others, and I think in other ways, actually, to deal with it on a more strategic way as well and establish a relationship with different academic units. We have previously, not in the last couple of years because of COVID and everything, and changing structures, but met with division areas as well, and sort of worked to establish a relationship with the deans or whoever it is, and do presentations at that school or unit or division level so we can actually clarify exactly what our role is and what we play. So, we're not just there to advocate for the student. Our role is also to support staff and be clear that we, as a university, actually have legal obligations that we need to do and it is our responsibility jointly to make sure that we meet those. I think once you've established that, I think that's a good basis to work from because then you're actually presenting it with all staff there and you're presenting it in front of the management level who will make those decisions, can make those decisions, and if they're supportive, it is good for — that can feed down to staff. I've had staff quite loudly screaming at me in the corridor saying, “How can they be studying, how can we let them study?” Because all their conditions that they've got, and to this person now proactively contacting us to say, “Are there any students in my course I need to be taking into consideration?” I think sometimes we need to take a softly, softly approach with some academics and it is going to change depending on their personality, your personality, what's happening with the students as well, but I think what you were saying, Tracey, it is being honest about what we can do, what is reasonable in what our obligations are and working from there.

TRACEY: We have had situations where academics have said, "Your students,” or, "The DRC students,” the Disability Resource Centre students, and we have to say, "No, actually, they are Deakin students. They're our students. They're not a separate entity. We're all in this together.” Yeah.

JAYNE: Ultimately, Darlene, sometimes I might have to go to a program director and feedback to get some support from them or a higher divisional level, but ultimately, because I'm sort of on the lower end of the food chain, I pass that straight up to my manager.

DARLENE: That good old handballing.

JAYNE: I'm awesome at it.

MIRELA: Anything else, Mirela? Similar to what I was saying before, that, again, it depends on personalities. It doesn't work with everyone, but sometimes to kind of outline the benefits of a particular adjustment to other students as well. So, it's not just individual adjustments. You know, closed captions for recordings. We've had lecturers saying, “I want students to take notes.” But they're not sitting in your lecture and 50% of students in your class are not sitting there and they might want to listen on the way to work and it is easier to read the subtitles if you're on a noisy train. So, that sometimes works as well, to say, “Well, how about this?” That’s a benefit to everyone in your unit.

DARLENE: Excellent. We didn't get any response to the question around the biggest challenge, so we will leave that one. If you do think of any of the challenges, feel free to write that in the chat box.

JAYNE: We talked about working with the lectures, but I think our role is to try and minimise the impact it does have on academic staff because they have a multitude of things impacting on them. And it’s that collaboration together. So, we're all in this together. If we can minimise what they need to do, it is important. I've even drafted an email for an academic who is trying to respond to a student to help them with their understanding of the wording and things that they need to include which they appreciate. I think we're also talking about that strategic approach. If we can look at strategically implementing inclusivity within the university, we minimise any necessity for people to do anything special or different and over the years, that's what I've seen, is that I've previously started the role working on an individual basis and problem solving, and those individual circumstances inform strategic work, and so this online environment and we've got multi access suites, assistive technology. All of this stuff is minimising the strategic approach within the whole university is important. It means it takes the pressure off the academics as well.

JAYNE: Good point. We have talked about academics and the educators. The next, I suppose, thing in this equation is the student. Do you have any suggestions on how to manage student expectations around what your role is, what you should be doing as a disability practitioner? Mirela, I might go to you first.

MIRELA: It's similar to what Tracey and Jayne have been saying, being honest and giving them information on our role. We tend to say we're not advocates for them because that tends to move into one of our next questions about dependencies. There is a separate advocacy group and avenues should they have other difficulties, but we are there to negotiate the learning access plans and support them if they have any difficulties with any adjustments. But also looking at the course on the course requirements. Again, being honest and saying what is needed, where adjustments can be made and where they cannot be made and whether then that course is the right course for the student. I find that we, for example, in our marketing area, in admissions, they try and get everyone in and enrol in full time courses and we're backing off and saying the opposite again. Maybe, this isn't the right course for you because you have to come on campus for certain things, or maybe you should reduce the number of subjects or units you study because of the load that it has on you and your health. So, we’re kind of the enemy of the marketing area sometimes because we tell them to reduce their load so they can manage that and pass their units. So, it is managing those expectations and sometimes just informing them about how things work, because they don't necessarily, especially when they're just starting, understand all the different systems and requirements.

DARLENE: We have had a question posed in the chat which is how would you deal with a situation where a student wants an adjustment that is not supported with their documentation that they've provided? Mirela, did you want to…

MIRELA: So, an adjustment that’s in the documentation?

DARLENE: Not supported in the documentation, so the student has asked for an adjustment, but their documentation doesn't come up with that.

MIRELA: It depends on the conversation with the student. If it's an adjustment that, again, more experience would give you a better idea, but if it's an adjustment that sounds like it is one that can support the student, that is a line, or maybe something that they have had previously at another university, school or somewhere else, and if it can be implemented from the course's perspective, from the academic perspective, that is definitely something you can discuss with them. We have had it the other way around where doctors have recommended adjustments or said students require adjustments that we cannot provide because it doesn't meet the requirements of the particular course. Both are not proscriptive, we don't just have to put in place what the documentation says, but also we're not restricted by what is in the documentation, if that makes sense.

DARLENE: It's one of the challenges for the sector. We are medicalised in requiring documentation, but all of us, ethically, will come from a human rights or social model of disability and we would be wanting to put the student at the centre and they're the expert of what their own adjustments are. It is one of the challenges that exists for us as disability practitioners is unpacking that. Jayne or Tracey, anything that you want to add to that question or anything more around the managing student expectations?

JAYNE: That's a good question Rebecca raised about if it's not supported by documentation, there's the discussion about what is it that they're concerned about, previous experience, sometimes we get practitioners overprescribing, getting quite generous about what things they might suggest for students. So, I think it is a bit of a discussion and it then also goes down to: Is it reasonable or not reasonable? Sometimes, I have students coming in saying, “What can I get?” Is their first exclamation, and I say, “It's not what you get, but how your condition impacts on your study,” and we work backwards from there. I've had students asking for something that was not, in my experience, reasonable and I have just needed to indicate that I would need more information or documentation from their treating practitioners too so that we've got some transparency for the decision making around their request.

DARLENE: Elaine has asked also - probably more to what you were saying, Jayne - what happens if a student and managing a student who has asked for multiple access to services such as live captioning with transcription and note taking, so more adjustments than one or two, how do you manage that?

JAYNE: I think it's the same discussion about what is reasonable in terms of that, because the transcription already provides the note taking. It is exactly the same discussion. They're tricky discussions to do as well because we don't want to be seen as gatekeepers, but it's also about reasonable adjustment.

TRACEY: With that question from Eileen, sometimes it is unpacking - why does the student feel that they need all of those things, especially note taking and, perhaps, there is some form of assistive technology that would be better served. It is unpacking, is the student coming from a place of anxiety about potentially missing one item that is super important - that's why they want note taking - rather than just saying, yeah, we will give you all of these things, we will just understand why you feel you need these things or what the situation is and then make that decision accordingly.

DARLENE: Brilliant. Time is getting away from us. It is amazing, you think you have all the time in the world. We just wanted to ask the question: Imagine you are a student with disability, what would be the most important personal quality you would like in a disability practitioner? We thought we’d get a reflective question out there to think for you, as new practitioners, what you would find of value if you were a student coming to you? While we're getting you to answering that question, the next question is, I suppose, why we're even here, is: What advice would you give to people starting out in the role? So, Jayne, I might throw to you first.

JAYNE: Shameless plug for ADCET. The information on there developed over the years is amazing and there's so much information in there and it is constant and it's there 24/7, so always checkout ADCET for information and guidance. I think it's really important to be clear about what your role is when you start. What is your role, what your limitations are as well. I think it is good to have good stuff around you, good colleagues, but you can't make that choice when you start out. Just being clear about what your role is and what you can do. If you're not sure, say, "I need to get back to you on that. I need to clarify it.” We get so many things thrown at us. I started in 2002 in the role and every day, every week, there's a new thing that I haven't come across and I still have to reach out to my colleagues and ask their advice or their suggestions or what do you think we do in this situation. I think making sure that you know what your limits are and when you need to reach out for support from other people when making decisions.

DARLENE: Anything else to add, Mirela or Tracey?

TRACEY: I think your colleagues — it's such a welcoming and supportive group across the country. It is amazing how much support you get from people who does this job day in and day out because it is not an easy job. You have your good days and your bad days and that's to be expected. Figuring out things together is a very important part of this job.

DARLENE: Just in answer to the question around what you would like to see in a disability practitioner if you were a student, we have had some great responses, understanding, empathetic, easy to talk to, drives action, honesty and straight talking, collaborative spirit, active listening skills, lived experience can also help. We have a question around how do you balance the needs of a student who has live captioning and the needs of class dynamics which can be very noisy and teachers encouraging lively chatter which can overlap at times, how do we balance the needs of the stenographer to ensure you can provide captions and welcoming ideas and strategies if you have students who are deaf that you have supported?

MIRELA: We found with a student who has live captioning, it doesn't work in noisy environments. We provided an assistant, study assistant. The student was hard of hearing, not entirely hearing impaired, and so in that situation, it worked to have someone there more or less repeating into his ear what the main conversation topic was. Because the live captioners, it was just impossible to really capture what the main conversation was. That may not work for everyone either.

DARLENE: One of the other things around support, I am sure you’re all signed up, I’m just going to put a link to the AustEd list. The AustEd list is one of those things which I've been blown away with - if you have a student with adjustment needs that you haven’t come across before and your team, it’s also new to them, put it onto the list and hopefully you will get a whole heap of responses. It's such a generous place, such a supportive world that list serves. If you haven't signed up to it, I encourage you to sign up. The next question is the line around supporting needs and creating dependency. We've probably talked about the relationship with the students, how do you manage — we talked about the expectations, but also the challenges, is there a risk of students becoming dependent on you or even academics becoming dependent on you? How do you ensure that the relationship remains professional?

TRACEY: My screen has frozen… Luckily, it’s not in an awkward pose. Supporting needs and creating dependency, this is an ongoing struggle that we have some students want you to hold their hand through everything and can get quite irate if you encourage them to do their own work, but it's the whole story about fish and fishing. Where you give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish and he can eat forever, or something along those lines. Where there is a tendency for students to want me to act on their behalf, what I have done, and as you can see our focus on the practical solution is to say if you want to email your unit chair or your academic, feel free to CC me in. I'm not going to email on your behalf, but I'm happy for you to CC me into that email so you know that I know what's going on. The last thing you want to do, I work three days a week and I've got a caseload of 300 students, is I cannot be there for all of them all the time. So, while students do come to me and ask all sorts of questions that have nothing to do with my job, you learn to very quickly pass them on, that old handball that we're quite good at, on to the relevant team, but also encourage students to figure it out for themselves, and talk about how they're going to problem solve for themselves in the future once they've left university and how important it is that they develop those skills now in a fairly safe environment with the assistance of their disability practitioner.

DARLENE: Tracey, maybe turn your video off and on and that might fix the problem, but I am glad that it froze in a good face because I've seen some funny faces before. Just looking at the time and we've still got quite a few questions, so moving to one of the important questions, because we've talked about all the rosy stories and the happy stories, what happens if someone does complain about you and the service? We thought it would be good to have that discussion too. Jayne, I might throw to you for that one.

JAYNE: What would I want to know as a new practitioner when I first started? We come in here and it's all rainbows and unicorns and we’re all caring and often, you tell people what your job is, people say it must be so great working with people with disability, and yes, it is, but as with any area, you have people that can be challenging to work with and I suppose one of the reasons I raised it is that I did early on, in my first couple of years, I had a student make a complaint that went up to the Human Rights Commission at that time. It was professionally and personally challenging. I was very lucky to have a really, really supportive manager through that process. Reflecting on that was making sure that I document everything with students so that there is total transparency about what decisions are being made, the reasons they are being made, what support has been put in place for that student. So, that was something that was quite an eye opener for me and very challenging, so all I can suggest is that sometimes, you're going to have people who are not happy with our services, both staff and students, and being clear about what your role is, what you can and can't do and if you feel that you are struggling, make sure that you consult with your manager, consult with your colleagues about what is reasonable, make sure that you document everything so then there's transparency of decision making and you can support if there is any queries about what support you have and haven't provided, you've got that documentation to back you up if a complaint is either internal or external.

DARLENE: Great advice. We have got Tracey in voice, but not in video. I thought that might’ve solved it, not gotten rid of you totally. One of the other questions is around disclosure, I suppose, students talking about their disability, and often you have that diversity in the student cohort or you've got school leavers, people returning to study, mature age, so that question around disclosure can often be a different conversation with different students, but what are some of the suggestions you would give for new disability practitioners around having that conversation around disclosure? Tracey, did you want to start first?

TRACEY: I think the word "disclosure" can be very scary. I think it's sharing. It's talking about who do you feel comfortable sharing your information with and why. That could be a placement coordinator or somewhere where you're doing your internship or a future employer. Students are worried about what is going to happen to that information or how far their information is going to go that they disclose internally, whether that's going to go externally, and once they have had that reassurance that the information that they share with us, in particular, is not going to go any further, then they're quite happy. I'm not sure if I have answered the question because I missed the first bit.

DARLENE: You have, yes, and I think you covered off — “disclosure” is a word we use and not often people with disabilities, so that is sharing information.

MIRELA: Same, share the information and being clear about where the information goes and what we can and can't do if they disclose or not disclose, but on the flip side of that, we have also had the experience of students overdisclosing to a lot of people. So, the ones that email everyone, including the vice-chancellor and every head of school. I think it is just to rein them in and to say that this may not be beneficial for you if what they're disclosing impacts on others, whether it's about what they think of the student or what might trigger something for themselves if they've disclosed experiences. So, that's the flip side of that. If you need someone to talk to, we have this counselling service here. You can talk to me or another person, rather than sharing everything with everyone. We have had all sorts of different scenarios of under or overdisclosure.

JAYNE: That's a really important point. We've had that and it's to the detriment of the student, but I think it's also — the way that we operate, and I know some universities operate differently, is that when we complete an access plan, we send it to the student and we only send it to the program director for their information. We're clear with the student about the levels of privacy of their documentation that they send to us which stays in our service, and we're clear about their access plan that we only send it for information to the program director and it is the students' responsibility to disclose as appropriate. I would work individually with the students about what that means for them, and it would depend on what their condition is, what adjustments they're wanting and the sort of program they're in. Like, for example, a student who needs an extra ten minutes in exams, that is an automated process for us. They don't even need to let their course coordinators know. If they do need to use a different coloured texta on a board, then we would need to talk to their tutors or lecturers, and I think — so, it is on an individual basis, but I also say to students that academics don't know what support you need unless you let them know. So, it's important for them to let them know if they do want support, but also not to randomly send their access plan to all of their academics, because often they send it and they go, there you go, and expect them to read it and understand it. So, I say to students, it is really important for you to think about what are you asking for, what are you asking of them and what do you need and being specific about what that might be. So, it might be at the start of the study period they feel comfortable about doing it because they need it, or they need an extension. So, they only do that at the time that they need the extension, so it just needs to be personalised to that student.

DARLENE: That two minutes went quickly. We have reached the end. We have got a few more questions that we had wanted to ask, but we haven't got the time. I've just added a question into the chat box: What supports do you think could be helpful for you in your role? If you wanted to add that, we might be able to look at whether there is anything else we can do to support you in your role. It's been a fantastic discussion. You think an hour is a long time and then you start and it goes quickly. Thank you to our three panellists, your wisdom and the sharing your information was great. We will also put this up on ADCET with some of the chat and so forth so we can keep the conversation going. I want to also thank the interpreters and the captioner for today. So, thank you, everybody, and have a great day.