# Critical Conversations - Disclosing disability in higher education

DARLENE MCLENNAN: So first, I just want to start by saying that my name is Darlene McLennan. If you don't know me, I am the manager of the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training and also a National Disability Coordination Officer based in Tasmania. Today, the session is captioned and also Auslan interpreted. To access the closed captions, you can access those at the bottom of your screen and Jane will now put in the OneCap link if you want to actually access the captions through a website. Firstly, I want to acknowledge that I am coming to you from Lutruwita, Tasmanian Aboriginal land. We acknowledge with deep respect the traditional custodians of this land, the Palawa people. In the spirit of reconciliation, ADCET respectfully acknowledges the Lutruwita nations and also recognises the Aboriginal history and culture of the land and I pay my respects to Elders, past and present, and to the many Aboriginal people that did not make Elder status. I wish to acknowledge and pay respects to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community that continue to care for Country. I stand for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspective, culture, language and history in a continued effort to fight for Aboriginal justice and rights, paving a way for a strong future. I'd also like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the various lands on which you are all working today and also pay respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who may be participating in this session today. This session is a new idea for us at ADCET, we are excited that in partnership with the NDCO program, we wanted to bring about an opportunity to have some big picture discussions with the sector. Sometimes, there is some ideas or new thoughts that kind of go across the sector that we don't actually take the time to actually discuss or debate or hear from other points of view, so this is an opportunity to have those kind of what we are calling ‘critical conversations’. As I said at the beginning, this is an online meeting, so we encourage you to mute while you are not talking. The session is being recorded, so you can have your video on or off. We will be asking throughout the session if people want to ask a question, they can either put it into the chat, or they can put their hand up and we will go over to you and hopefully your video or your sound will work. We'll play that by ear. We really do encourage conversations and we really want this to be a really robust kind of conversation and it is a bit scary, but I am willing to see how we go. I think one of the silver linings of COVID is that the technology such as Zoom, more and more people are more confident in engaging in that way and having conversations. Over to the topic today. Recently a paper was published, Three Decades of Misconception Defining People With Disability in Australia Higher Education Policy. This paper argues that in the context of higher education, people with disability are subject to both cultural and economic injustice which causes tension in how students are supported, both by high level policy and educational practice. We are fortunate to have two of the authors of this paper with us and I'd like to introduce those two members. We have the Associate Professor, Tim Pitman, from the National Centre of Student Equity in Higher Education, and Dr Matt Brett, Director of Academic Governance and Standards at Deakin University. We did set the link to the paper, but we know people are time poor. I am just going to ask Tim to describe briefly, in one minute or less, to provide a bit of an overview of the paper.

TIM PITMAN: Thanks, Darlene. First, a couple of acknowledgments, I am coming from Perth, Western Australia, which is Whadjuk land, and I want to pay my respects to their Elders, past and present. I also want to acknowledge Katie Ellis, unfortunately she couldn't be here today, but this was a team effort. I can offer a couple of insights into the paper and hopefully, they can spark that conversation we are looking at. I want to focus on the nature of classifying counts of disability in higher education. We have come a long way since the early 90's and in particular, with the advent of the Disability Discrimination Act in 1992. Back in the higher education sector there, it is quite easy on the one hand to point to the gains and improvements that have occurred in the sector over a 30-year period. We are at a stage now where our understandings of disability and disability support are much more mature and critical and much more nuanced than they were 30 years ago. In the paper, one thing we explore is what we call the recognition distribution paradox, and that is that these are the two sides of the coin essential in providing students with disabilities. On the one hand, you have the policy approach redistribution. This acknowledges that for particular types of ... of a society, in this case, persons with disability, there are social, economic and structural barriers that set up blocks stopping them from succeeding. There is a need to intervene. There is a need to actually put into place policies, processes and support mechanisms to assist these persons with disability. This is, at its heart, a deficit discourse as we know. Deficit discourses are problematic because they position, in this case, disability as a negative, as a lacking, as a deficit. But from a policy perspective, they are important because to not do this is to deny the lived experience of persons with disabilities and that is that society creates barriers for them and society disables them. On the other side of the coin is what we call the recognition aspect, and this is understanding and recognising the diversity of the experiences verses the disability, and the individual identities that are created and constructed. This is a much more positive discourse. What Matt and Katie and I argue in the paper is the entire way of collecting and reporting data in the system is still around the notion of redistribution and the notion of deficit and we've actually got very mature and robust supporting mechanisms, but we are questioning whether that data has been used for anything meaningful to support students with disability. In the paper, we point to several instances where institutions report data differently that create big inaccuracies in how students with disability are represented in their university. We also point in the paper to the disability support officers … are an intimate and strong advocacy in understanding how our students should be supported, but the way this data is collected and information is communicated up the channel and to the federal government level means that meaningful action is not taken as well as it should. This is what we mean by the recognition dilemma. On the one hand, we have to acknowledge the deficits of disability, we have to acknowledge the role that society places in creating barriers and it is useful to collect and code and define disability, but on the other hand, we have got all this data and it is aggregating, it is creating this very aggregate understanding of what disability is and we think it is inhibiting further change. That's more than a minute. I'd like to pass on to Matt if he wants to add anything that I haven't covered.

MATT BRETT: Thanks, Tim. Thanks, Darlene, and thanks, everyone, for joining us today. When one puts together a paper for an economic journal, one is lucky to get one or two or three people reading it, but we have got 98 people in the room already who are choosing to embark on a conversation based on the work we have been doing. So thanks, everyone, and looking at the list of participants, there are many long‑standing DLO's that have made a huge and positive impact on the students for students with disability, so I want to say thank you for your work and thanks for coming along today. In terms of the paper itself, I think Tim has done a fantastic job of summing it up and I don't want to elaborate too much, but I do think it is worthwhile maybe drawing attention to some of the conclusions in the paper which talk about taking a different approach, taking — bringing a new frame to the way in which we may be thinking about what data we collect, what we do with it and what use and utility it has. I think through the course of today's conversation, I would hope that we would be able to tap into your rich insights given your experience of disability in the sector to have a think about what can we do differently and what might be more useful to have a better experience for people with disability in higher education?

DARLENE: Thanks, Matt. So before we kind of unpack those kind of bigger questions, we just wanted to run a poll. So Jane, if you want to put the poll up? We are wanting to understand how people think, what people think about the effectiveness of the Disability Discrimination Act and the Disability Standards and Education in protecting people. So the question is, how effective is the DDA and the DSE legislation in protecting people with disability from less favourable treatment in higher education? There are three answers: one is effective, one is ineffective, and the other is it is complicated. So I think it is not our relationship status, it is what we feel about the legislation. I will give you a couple more seconds to answer that. Okay, Jane, are you right to end the poll? So we have 12 per cent of people said it is effective, 4 per cent said it is ineffective and 84 people said it is complicated. Probably shouldn't have added that little bit at the end. So Matt and Tim, does that surprise you, those answers?

TIM: I will go through this briefly and no, it doesn't surprise me. I think one thing ‑ we are seeing a lot of things ‑ but certainly one thing we are seeing is universities when it comes to disability support, they are running at different speeds and gears. Underpinning this work was a 12-month fellowship I did and we surveyed over 1700 students with disabilities which was a fantastic response and a critical thing we found was if you could imagine that the disability officers at the DLO are the centre locus, it is like dropping a pebble in the lake and spreading out. The connections and the contacts with those people overall are really positive and affirmative, but as the ripples spread outwards throughout the university, the power becomes dissipated and the message becomes muted. The problem with students is that 90 per cent of their time is spent outside the disability support office with teachers, with staff, with other academics, and that's why it is complicated. You can have pockets of absolute brilliance and support and we can see from the survey responses that you can have a student going from university A to B and being really happy because the level of support has increased and the reverse happens as well. Individual interactions with individual persons at the university can sometimes make or break a students' learning experience.

DARLENE: Anything you want to add to that, Matt?

MATT: Yeah, it doesn't surprise me that we've got a high proportion of people saying it is complicated. Disability officers work in the space of making reasonable adjustments or identifying reasonable adjustments and they are always context‑dependent and dependent on the individual and it is complicated, so I wouldn't expect anything different given today's audience, but I do think it is worthwhile turning attention to the positive and the negative response which was running 3 to 1, if my maths is correct, or a 4 to 1 in terms of DDA working as opposed to some not working. We see even today, can you imagine 30 years ago having a gathering of disability‑focused individuals with, not just one, but two sign language interpreters and live captioning, and transcript available afterwards, et cetera, et cetera? So things have improved a lot. We have normalised disability support in all sorts of positive ways, but we have still got some work to do and I think there are some systemic flaws and problems in a legal framework and in a higher education framework that we need to build on the successes that we can easily point to, to do even better in the future.

DARLENE: Brilliant. Thank you. I just wanted to encourage people, because as I said at the beginning of this, we are really wanting to have a conversation and encourage people to share their thoughts or to put some questions into the chat as we go along. So just in the paper, Matt and Tim, you identify that people with disability are still subject often to both economic and cultural disadvantage in the Australian higher education policy and describe this as recognition distribution dilemma where this population must both deny and claim their subjectivity which, Tim, you actually highlight in your intro. How do we make a distinction between the economic and cultural disadvantage and what is the impact of this distribution dilemma for people with disability?

TIM: I'd like to answer that by addressing a question which Milly put in where she said, what we have learned about student disability because identity is fundamental to disclosure, the two are intertwined. Both in the act of identifying, in disclosing having a disability, but also who you choose to disclose to, the way in which you disclose, how a person identifies themselves. I actually should have said in terms of ideation myself, I identify as a disability ally, so wherever possible, I am trying to use the student voice to say these are the experiences that students have shared with me and in doing so, I acknowledge that these individual experiences being shared do not necessarily represent in any way an aggregate or a uniform or majority position. In general terms, the recognition side of it is, overall, the universities are seen as safe spaces by the majority of students with disability. We actually identify student supports through 6 various domains and the first one is attitudes, in other words, what is the general attitude within the institution to persons with disability? That's where universities across all 6 domains rated the highest. Overall they rate very, very highly. There are two important co‑skills to that. The first is that for a lot of students, they identify that their situation is invisible. That gives them agency on whether or not to disclose. That gives them a lot of power on whether they choose to disclose, or not, and the more that power is taken away from them, the more, for example, their disability is visible or identified by other people. There is a tendency in the data to see they are less happy with the attitudes towards them. That's an important part. The second part was for some students, one experience can be devastating and again students have recounted through the survey data and through the interviews we conducted of an overall strong institutional support, very clearly defined processes, very well organised access plans, but then the interactions of one person at the coal face, it can have devastating experiences for that student. This is ongoing, for some students that I talk to, they feel they are living on a knife edge, they feel that their very next interaction can be the one that will devastate them.

DARLENE: That's huge, isn't it. Matt, did you want to add something as well?

MATT: I think, picking up on the crux of that recognition redistribution dilemma, this will be something that's familiar to many people here today and that comes down to: what do you call the surface? There is a lot of pressure out there to move away from disability liaison officer, or the disability support service because there are many people for whom that's not a fundamental part of their identity, their chronic mental health or health issues. Sometimes, it is a bit of a conceptual jump for them to sort of say, I will access that particular service. So, on the one hand, there is recognising disability as an issue, on the other hand, how do you sort of accommodate and recognise there are some that are reticent to engage with that idea? There’s no easy answers to this. I am sure lots of people in the room have experienced kind of those challenges and those tensions and debates around whether or not to maintain the language of disability or to move to something else, and if you do move, how do you recognise? How do you give due prominence to an idea that many people see as fundamental to who they are? It is very, very tricky.

DARLENE: This is probably one of the next critical conversations I would like to hold because certainly as a sector, there are many of the disability teams around the country in TAFEs and in the higher education sector have changed their names and I think it is one of those critical conversations we need to have. We also have people with disability, many people with disability, identity is very strong, and then we are also now also understanding ableism a lot more within the world generally, but also within academia. What data do you think could have an impact on advancing the social understandings of disability? Is it reasonable to ask students that question around their disability?

TIM: I will let Matt go first for once.

MATT: I mean, fundamentally, in my view, we do need a more sophisticated view of disability as a starting point before we actually start jumping into what data would we collect and how do we approach it? When the enrolment declaration for disability was first agreed to in the early 90’s, in a recent book chapter, Lynne Martin, who ran the project in getting those indicators in place reveals that there was a lot of debate around the table with vice chancellors and government officials around whether or not there should be an indicator for disability, or not, and in the end they passed it only narrowly with a vote from that committee. If there might have been one or two votes differently, we might be having a different conversation today. That indicator was agreed as a temporary one year trial and stayed unchanged until, I think, 2019 or 2020. Only recently, it has just been changed. In terms of the data that we have been drawing upon and utilising, fundamentally, it is the result of a compromise struck 30 years ago with a very imperfect understanding of what disability means. I think in terms of moving forward, and without getting too bogged down into what would be more useful, I think it is useful calling out what we've had and what we have been using has been deeply flawed and we do need a better way, and I'd be interested in any thoughts that the audience and participants in today's conversation have as to what would be a better, more robust, conceptually sound and pragmatically useful definition of disability.

TIM: I don't think I have anything to add to that; I think Matt has covered it well and I am interested in that. I just noticed that Helen Thomas posted that higher education has a lot to learn from schools in terms of using voice and agency. I think that's spot‑on. This is a question that Jackie has posted that I actually want to open and see what people think because Jackie said that 75 per cent of the students accessing disability at her university have mental health conditions, so there is strong grounds to change from disability. What I experienced when I was speaking to the students ‑ again, it was 1700 students ‑ that there was only a couple of instances, but nonetheless it was a couple, that students who got into one‑to‑one communication said, "Tim, why are you calling mental health a disability?" And my response was it is officially responded in the team categories and these students said, "We don't see that as a disability." Again, it gets back to that recognition that within these sub-communities, identity is very important in terms of identifying and identifying for the purposes of support and recognition, there is some resistance to calling mental health a disability. I am really curious to see from the DSO's and from others what their experiences are or thoughts of that are.

DARLENE: Well, this is going to take us down another little path, I think. So if people want to keep the conversation going in the chat, that would be absolutely brilliant. One of the questions was: what do you see as the role of state government in the higher education policy in this space and in facilitating change? So, you know, you've got your state, but also federal policy drivers around that change. So any thoughts on government and their role to play in this?

TIM: I have thoughts and I don't know that they will be shared by Matt or anyone else. The reality is that states have vacated the space in higher education and they have vacated the space for a quarter of a century. As soon as the federal government controlled the purse strings, the state government has vacated the space. So what do I see as the role of the state government? Zero. The reality is, and this gets to another critical part of the DDA, is the fundamental structure means that the buck stops with the institution, so when it comes to supporting students with disability, the onus rests on the institution. You now have 3 players, you have the university who is ultimately responsible for making sure that discrimination doesn't occur, you have the federal government who is still the major heavy lifter for funding universities and has a responsibility to ensure that they are adequately resourced for students with disability. I think in that environment, the key relationship is between the universities and the federal government and in getting those support structures correct. Matt, what do you think?

MATT: Um, I agree with some caveats and sorry to get all theoretical here, but there is a view about universities in the modern state that they've got positional centrality and that relates to the fact that universities today kind of interact with every feature of the modern nation state, whether it be banking, health, education, finance, et cetera, et cetera. So universities are kind of right there at the crossroads of everything. Yes, the Commonwealth has the financial purse strings and has the responsibility to nudge the university in a particular direction. Universities, by virtue of that centrality, interact with state governments, interact with state education systems, health systems, et cetera. So I think there is a role there for the state, particularly when it comes to the relationship between school education and progress through the universities to play a role, to be thinking critically around how its responsibilities for educating its young people is supporting into an effective transition into universities and engaging with universities in the right way. I really like the question posed by Matilda and I wonder if she would be comfortable with getting off mute and on screen to elaborate on that question, but I think the question around the social structures and the challenges of working with those social structures, I think if you take that idea of the centrality of universities seriously, those social structures are incredibly complicated and not just about the university, but how the university deals with broader society. I think that's where the unpacking a little bit in terms of how fair is it to put the responsibility on individual people with disabilities to solve those structural barriers? I think it is a shared responsibility between the individual, the state, the Commonwealth, the institutions, staff and broader staff to play a role in dismantling those barriers and I suppose part of the question today is what data, what approach would be helpful or useful in supporting that process, noting that what we've got has been okay? It has improved things a lot, but it still leaves a lot of challenges, still results in a lot of discrimination, which is frankly unlawful and needs to change.

DARLENE: Thanks, Matt. So you raised about that data and for the sector, there has been some changes recently for the higher education sector in regards to the disability support program that does fund a certain amount of adjustments or a percentage of adjustments for people with disability in higher education, but also HEIMS data category has recently changed. I’m just wondering does this align with your recommendations or your paper that you wrote around those changes to that data?

TIM: So from my point of view, my view has changed. I have been in a research of higher education policy now for 15 years. I have focused on social inclusion, diversity and access for all of 15 years, but I've really moved actively into the space of disability research in the last 3 to 4 years, and that has changed my view. My view from the researcher point of view, is I love data and we collect robust data in Heems, but the more I move into this space, the more I hear from persons with disability and allied people with disability, and I think this is really fraught. There is a lot of really good data that has been collected, but it is not being used. I should qualify that because at one stage I was scrolling through and I see a couple of names of people here who I know have done excellent work with the data and made some interesting insights, but I would say that they are exceptions to the rule. When you are talking about 75,000 students at some level of disclosing something about themselves, and that data, like the Indiana Jones original movie, the art gets locked up in a warehouse and never gets seen again, it does concern me and I think there are some moral implications to that that concern me. So, if we are going to collect that data, we need to use it better and we need to be able to show directly back to the relative disability communities that we are using this data responsibly and to their benefit.

MATT: Just to build on that, I think that change and indicator is a step in the right direction, so it is a positive. But it is just a single step in what I would consider to be a much longer and more important journey. I think it is worth noting along those lines that the indicator that was superseded included information around disability indicators and it wasn't until some research that Darlene was involved in through UTAS in 2016/2017, and some work that I had done in publishing some work around disability, that was the first time that there was formal publication or analysis of those subcategories of disabilities. For 25 years, the data had been sitting there, might have been used here and there for institutional purposes, but it was pretty much ignored by everyone. It is hugely problematic. Part of that is not a function of the data, but a function of the way in which staff and institutions have engaged with that data, so the change and indicator, I think, coincides with maybe greater sophistication in the sector around how to use it. And I saw some analysis that was undertaken by Merrin McCracken last week who has pulled out the mental health subcomponents of that indicator, which is fantastic data, and I'd be really keen to hear from Merrin directly as to what motivated that, what might have changed to get a bit more engrained in the data and what she thinks might be useful in terms of the change and indicator and where it might be heading in the future in the spirit of a conversation? If Merrin is able to speak to that. Sorry to put you on the spot, Merrin.

MERRIN MCCRACKEN: Hi, everybody.

DARLENE: Have you got a camera, Merrin at all?

MERRIN: I have got it turned on.

TIM: I can see Merrin.

MERRIN: I have long been interested in what we can do with having a look at both the data we collect in our services, that broader data, but also some of the big institutional surveys and there has been ‑ and I think for us as providers, the mental health area has posed probably the biggest challenge of the last 5 to 10 years and while I am always a bit hesitant about collecting information around disability categories, or types, I think particularly in that mental health area, it was really interesting to me. We've always at Deakin done a bit of analysis on some of those big surveys on pulling out the disability side of things, so the graduate destinations, what's happening with students with disabilities and how do they sit with students without disability, what happens to students in the student satisfaction surveys and where are the differences, and we see things like differences around engagement, differences around graduate outcomes. This year, I went to our wonderful planning unit and said, can we pull that information out now around mental health specifically and make a comparison with that compared to all students with disability and students without? It was the first time that I'd actually seen what we probably suspected, is that there is actually quite a gap between students with mental health and their experiences and success and so on compared to all students with disability, or to other students with disability and to all students. So it just, like it is just the data, but it was really ‑ we are working ‑ and I have been on a group with Matt that's looking at our mental health strategy for the university and it just was really, I guess, affirming that this is very important work that we are doing, but also opens up so many other questions and avenues that we might want to investigate. So yeah, it was really interesting to do and I am keen to hear if others are doing that sort of work. I think what interests me is how we might do that sort of sector‑wide too.

DARLENE: Brilliant. Did you want to respond at all, Matt?

MATT: Maybe just kind of recognising again, respecting the audience that we've got here today is that enrolment declaration is just that, a declaration at enrolment or re-enrolment, where students are talking about their experiences at that point in time. We all know that circumstances can change from the very minute they complete that form, life can happen, things can change, their identity, their understanding of intels, the interaction between their own unique attributes and a new novel environment that they are coming into can change, and other things happen. The biological processes and other things, onset of mental illness, accidents, et cetera. This notion of disability being a fixed attribute of a data statistic really needs to be challenged to something that's more dynamic and reflecting the barriers and experiences of education people have and I think the change of indicator is a step in the right direction. I think the future steps might need to be thinking more critically around understanding the experience of the students over the course of their studies, not just a once a year enrolment declaration process.

DARLENE: So we have that once a year process. I mean, should institutions be also kind of collecting data, or, I suppose, Merrin gave us a fantastic example of how the data can be used and I think for many years, I think data has just gone in and nothing has come out or we actually haven't taken the opportunity to explore it. Is there any other ways that you think we could use the data better or we should be utilising the data? Has anybody got any ideas that they want to add to the chat box? I am having a struggle catching up with all the questions that are coming in. So if anybody grabs the question...

TIM: I want to pick up on something that Judith said, she’s recounting the story of presenting a lot of information to a student who is trying to access support and Judith explains how the student could take that information to the university. That's another way of looking at data that when we say "collect data", there should be, ideally, a direct benefit to the person that you are interacting with, the person with disability, and if you can't do that then at the very least an indirect benefit by saying we will further our knowledge and broaden our understanding of this area so we can improve institutional policies. Then this has to kind of circle back. We tend to forget that the word "disability" is a relative newcomer to the policy. You can go back to the records, if you go back to the 1920’s, you can see reasonable adjustments being made in universities, and the language and the minutes and the language in the set papers and the language in the teaching and academic papers, they don't use the word ‘disability’, they say ‘blind’ student, ‘deaf’ student, they identify specific issues and how they dealt with them and the word ‘disability’ is a much more generic term. Society is disabling us, or this policy disables us, or whatever. I feel like we are almost coming full circle where reasonable adjustments and attitudes, positive attitudes towards people with disabilities go back over 100 years, but we have to go back over 100 years and say they are incredibly elite places so we are talking about the number of students you can count on the one hand and in that sense, the word ‘disability’ had no meaningful use, it just said this is the language at the time, there is a student here who is blind and I am going to arrange some braille for them. We then fast‑forwarded to the 1990's and we start to want to use this term ‘disability’ to draw awareness to a lot of issues that people are confronting and to understand and broaden our support and what I guess I am saying is it turns back to what I was saying earlier, we have now reached the stage where I wonder if that term has outlived its usefulness. I wonder if the term ‘disability’ is itself disabling. I haven't come to a conclusion there yet, but I think we need to stop focusing so much on that word and start focusing more on the individual experiences and requirements that students need in order to succeed.

DARLENE: Agree. So, Matt, earlier you spoke around the fair chance for all and we actually put a link into the chat so people can access that. I think the most recent writings that you did around fair chance for all, I mean, do you feel from the original work that was done and many moons ago, do you feel like there has been positive changes for students?

MATT: I think I am old enough for my memory to stretch back to the mid to early 90's and universities, et cetera, and I can say things have changed enormously and changed for the better, but things have evolved and things have grown a little bit more complicated in some ways. So these identity recognition issues that we are talking about with naming services and thinking about disability are, in some respects, a function of the success of access and thinking more broadly around the challenges that can be experienced by individuals whose health, body structures and functions ‑ not trying to get medical on you ‑ but the attributes of individuals, we've had a growing understanding of what that means and the kinds of things that are necessary to support effective learning. So things have got better, but it is now, I suppose, upon you, upon us collectively and on the sector to continue that involvement to make sure that everyone, no matter who they are who wants to engage in higher education is able to succeed and has the right supports in place. Not to diminish any of the quality chat that's coming through thick and fast and all the comments, et cetera, but I am going back to Matilda's comment around students having to fit in around the system that's designed in some ways to not accommodate their needs and I think there are some really big challenges there to make sure that the key structures in higher education, curriculum, assessment, policy, social, technological, et cetera, are as inclusive as they can be. Everyone here would agree that that's a really, really difficult challenge to get that right. But we need to strive to do better to make sure that everyone can succeed in higher education. One statistic that our flawed measures remind us of and that's that there is persistently low rates of success with students with disability compared to people who are not disclosing disability, and that's been the case for 30 years. We need to bridge that gap and we need to do better.

DARLENE: Thank you. Now, there has been fabulous chat which has kind of overwhelmed me a little bit because I am worried I am missing questions. I want to encourage, we have put Merrin on the spot there by turning her camera on and getting her to talk. Is anybody else willing to ask a question on camera, or even by audio just to kind of have that kind of have that conversation going as well as the chat? Just put your hand up. While we are waiting, I wanted to thank Alicia Ford, David Swain and Jane Hawkeswood for being in the background for us. You can unmute yourself if you want to talk.

JULIE ROGAN: Darlene, it is Julie Rogan here from Griffith. It is a bit of a comment really, but interested in other people's experiences. I have found often students going on placement that disclosure experience is often very negative. Mostly, I think, with the expectations of the university more than perhaps the employer, they are going to on what needs to be disclosed and giving some students with a disability a negative idea of what it will be like in the workplace if they disclose.

DARLENE: Any of our speakers want to make a comment to that?

MATT: Yeah, I think going back to what I was saying before around positional centrality, universities don't operate in isolation, as little isolated communities, they do intersect with the broader world, but we don't control that broader world. So I think we need to fix things in higher ed, but also higher ed can play a role in helping to fix the broader economy and labor market and that's complicated, particularly when you are talking about professions and all the other assumptions that are embedded in these things. But it is not just one thing, we need to fix ourselves in higher ed. We also need to try to work with the broader economy to help fix them as they need to take care of their own responsibilities under DDA, et cetera. Again, it is complicated and very challenging.

DARLENE: Excellent. Sylvanna, we've got you spotlighted now for the next question and then I think we'll go to Melinda Allan after that.

SYLVANNA MIRICHLIS: Thanks. I just wanted to weigh in because there was some talk in the chat about disclosure and kind of how we often talk about it as this one‑off thing, now that they've disclosed and now we know, but I think from what we have talked about, it is evident that it is more of an ongoing disclosure and how from time to time, situation to situation, things can evolve, and I think that kind of mixes in with that talk about data and how to use that because, okay, someone might disclose something at one point, but then how do we use that information and how to deal with that ever‑changing nature of it? That's a similar thing I have come across in my work, so for context, I work with Jackie at Curtin, but I also do research on disclosure in more of a mental health area, so it is something I can see in both ways and I also mentioned how, yes, there is a disclosure from the person themselves, but then talking about agency and things and how important that is and when we come across situations where someone might forward disclose that information or share that information on with others without necessarily the consent from that individual, or in a different situation on behalf of that person. Something at least from my research, yes, in a different context, but talking about that forward disclosure, something that participants have expressed is that concern of, you know, I wasn't really involved in that discussion, so I didn't have any control of how that would play out and how those other people would then use that information going forward. So I could go on and on about the social side.

DARLENE: Well, I think we have another topic for a webinar coming up, so we'll be in touch. Any comments, Matt or Tim?

TIM: No, I think that's really interesting, what Sylvanna said, and I was watching the chat around disclosure. We finished off our article with a quote from a person who identifies having a disability, it was with Chandler and it sticks in my head, it is the two things they said is the process of identification hurts and if you read their article then they are saying is this a good pain, a pain towards a positive outcome or a bad pain? The other quote that they make that resonates with me is my current attitude towards my identification of disability is… and that's been in the chat and I think that's what Sylvanna was saying is at one point in time, the person may wish to disclose and another person may not. At one point, they may identify primarily from their point of having a disability and at another point not and our systems are modernistic and they are not set up to deal with that and they are not going to be until we can embed disability awareness throughout the whole higher education community.

DARLENE: Thank you, Sylvanna, for sharing that. Matt, just a quick one because we have got Melinda also wanting to ask a question.

MATT: Yeah, just jump in quickly there. And advance notice, another paper that myself and Tim and Darlene have is coming out soon on the finances of disability in Australian higher education, and I think one of the issues with the data that highlights growth in participation of students with disabilities, either flawed metric, gives policy makers a flawed sense, yeah, what we are doing is working fine, so we don't need to do anything else and had we a stronger case to be able to invest an appropriate amount in the support of students with disabilities, we might be able to manage cohort tracking and monitoring and case managing students more effectively and you wouldn't have case loads of 400 or 500’s or whatever the numbers are, we'd be able to work more collaboratively on these disclosure issues and employment etc, but we can't do some of that because we don't have the money and the reason we don’t have the money is because it hasn't been prioritised. It hasn’t been prioritised because people think it’s okay, there’s not a problem there. We've got the wrong data telling us the wrong signals and it is creating problems down the track.

DARLENE: Good point. Melinda, you've got your hand up.

MELINDA ALLEN: It might take me a little while to figure out how to put it back down. My name is Melinda Allen, I am a program director with TAFE New South Wales, but Merrin, I am also a student of Deakin University and last year, I think, it was the first time I ever was in a position of needing to disclose that I had a disability, and I was able to access adjustments in my education with Deakin. Quite an unusual experience and just being sort of understanding what is the process going to entail, what should I expect, what does it mean for me? Some of that ‑ the issues that Shorna touched on which is around how much should I trust in sharing and without being able to see or hear some of those experiences around what to expect, it is very difficult, I think, for the organisation to demonstrate their trustworthiness as well. I absolutely felt supported. Some of the automation that's been able to be brought in there where my adjustments come out automatically and so, therefore, I don't need to continue to advocate for myself, but I know that if I need adjustments to my adjustments, I can go back and have those conversations. One of the big ones for me, sorry, I have done a stint with the Department of Education in New South Wales around the primary and secondary school students. We had a strong focus around the outcomes, both lifelong for students with disability. I am getting the sense that there is a gap for students in that transition period, it is like schools have this care to the gates and then beyond the gates, well, there is the big unknown, and that transition support for students with disability into higher education and the advocacy's voice probably switches for many students at that point, they need to advocate for themselves and understanding how we might be able to support that transition and build those connections, did you have any experiences or observations in that transition planning space?

DARLENE: Thanks, Melinda.

MATT: I might jump in first, Tim. First off, again, it is worth highlighting that there are differences in what happens in schools and what happens in universities and even from a data collecting perspective, the National consistent data collection for … Disability National Collections, Consistent Collection of Data is much more sophisticated than what we have got in higher ed. We are trying to go from one system that is trying to get a nuanced appreciation to a system that has a very flawed indicator. From a resourcing perspective, we have got Darlene as an NDCO spanning the whole of Tasmania. Just to highlight the resourcing challenges, how can we have an NDCO whose reason for being is to support transition of students from school to higher ed and employment and serving every student in Tasmania by herself? We need radical increase in the resourcing for disability in higher ed to do it properly, but we haven't had the data or the political interest or the policy interest in doing it better. I think if there is a take home message for today, it is find ways of using the data to make the claim for more resourcing to do it properly, because students are incredibly disadvantaged and pay a lifelong price for inadequate service and inadequate education and the caveat is that things have improved, but there is still a hell of a long way to go.

DARLENE: Melinda, the NDCO program is doing a number of different projects in that area, so we might connect with you offline and have a further conversation with you because I think you would be a great asset for us to talk to. Tim, is there anything futher you wanted to comment to there?

TIM: I'd love to, but I am conscious of the time. I'd rather give the voice to other people in these closing moments.

DARLENE: Well, I think we really revved up there at the end. We'll have to work out how to rev up in the first 10 minutes, because it is great to have everyone engaged as they did in the end. The conversation in the chat has been wonderful and there is already key things emerging for future critical conversations. We are going to send out a survey for everybody who has attended today and one of the questions in that survey is what are our next critical conversations that we can have. We will look through the chat and pull some of those things out. With one minute to go, I might hand to Tim and Matt for just one quick last comment each.

TIM: Just, thank you, this has been a great initiative, I have really enjoyed the chat. Thank you to Paul and Teale, just thank you everyone for contributing.

DARLENE: And Matt?

MATT: Yeah, ditto. Just keep up the good fight. Keep pursuing the right thing and any point in time if you'd like to hear more of my garbled words, feel free to tap me on the shoulder and I am happy to be rolled out at any time.

DARLENE: That’s brilliant. The conversation in the chat was great. We are investigating looking at trying to find some online forums that we can have themes and chats in the future as well. We are looking for an accessible forum, because I think today just showed some of the thinking that people are wanting to nut out with each other and it has been great to do that. Sorry if I have missed some of the chat or some of the questions, it went fast and furious there for a little while. But if any questions have gone unanswered, we'll endeavour to actually get back to you with those answers or post it on the website. This recording will be placed on the ADCET website. People who have registered will receive a link once that's gone up so you can re-watch the recording or share it with your friends and we really do encourage you to engage in our surveys so that we can find out what the next topic will be. Thank you, everybody, for joining us. Thank you to our captioner and our Auslan Interpreters, and thank you to our wonderful presenters, Matt and Tim, and to the back end people that supported this. Have a great day everybody. Take care.