MATT BRETT: So first off, welcome, everybody, to the launch of the Accessible ICT Procurement Implementation Guide . This event is being live captioned and Auslan interpreted. You can access the captions by clicking the CC button or some of the functionality in Zoom. I think OneNote is the mechanism and I think a link has been put into the chat on how to access the live captions.

I would first like to acknowledge the unceded traditional lands on which we meet today and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I’m joining you from the lands of the Wurundjuri in Melbourne, and I encourage you to share the land that you're from and where you're joining us from in the chat function if you choose.

Welcome to distinguished guests and speakers, and I should introduce myself first off. My name is Matt Brett. I’m Director of Academic Governance and Standards at Deakin University. I'm also interim Chair of ADCET’s advisory panel. I’ve been working to promote inclusion in higher education for my entire higher education career, which now spans about 25 years, and I’m delighted to be part of what I see is really groundbreaking and incredible work from those involved in this. I’ve noted in reviewing the registrations that there is representation from almost every university in the country. There's representatives from various government departments, peak bodies, including Universities Australia, and other tertiary education providers. So welcome, one and all.

It's a pleasure to be part of the launch of the Accessible ICT Procurement Implementation Guide for higher education and I pay homage to the spirit of cross-sector collegiality and collaboration that has led to this day. The Accessible ICT Procurement Implementation Guide has the potential to shift us further towards access by design which will benefit students and staff now and long into the future.

Before we start, we have some acknowledgements to make. And on behalf of the project team from ADCET and the NDCO Program, this consists of David Swayn hosted by STEPS Group Australia, Darlene McLennan, hosted by the University of Tasmania, Paul Power, hosted by the Wodonga Institute of TAFE, and David Tran hosted by Deakin University. I would like to acknowledge the contributors to this guide on the advisory panel and beyond for sharing their lived experiences and expertise. We thank you for your generosity, collaboration and knowledge shared to bring this project forward. The project itself was overseen by an advisory panel consisting of Bruce Maguire from Vision Australia, Francois Jacobs from Deakin University, Gunela Astbrink representing the Internet Society, Sam Germein from the University of South Australia, Andrew Normand, the University of Melbourne, Erica Schurmann from Curtin University, Jason Markou from the University of Sydney, Matthew Sherwood from Western Sydney University, Steve Johnston representing CAUDIT, Darren Britten, the NDCO Program and ADCET, and Natasha Edwards, Flinders University, and Brigitta Norton representing OZeWAI. Additional specific expertise and advice was provided by Dr Rooney Andrade at RMIT University, and Kim Neville from the Australian National University.

As you can see from that list, this is truly a cross-discipline collaboration, and really important and compelling work from my and hopefully your perspectives as well.

We would also like to thank the many other contributors from across the sector. I think the writing team from IFntopia met with and the writing team throughout the consultation. We appreciate all of your input for working with us on this valuable resource.

I would now like to get started with the formalities and would like to introduce Dr Ben Gaunlett to provide us with an opening address. Ben is the Disability Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission. Ben commenced his five-year term as Disability Discrimination Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission on May 7, 2019. Prior to commencing as Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Ben worked as a barrister in Western Australia and Victoria with a broad ranging practice. He has also worked as an associate at the High Court of Australia, as counsel assisting the Solicitor-General at the Commonwealth, a solicitor for a large commercial law firm and Tort Law in Australia and the United Kingdom. Ben studied at the University of Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar. As Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Ben advocates to remove barriers to people with disability participating in society and to ensure the human rights of people with disability are respected.

I will now hand over to Ben for Ben’s address. Thank you, Ben.

BEN GAUNTLETT: Thank you, Matt, for that kind introduction. I, too, would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which I am presenting to you all today. I'm on Gadigal land of the Eora nation in Sydney. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the audience today and also that we are all sitting on different lands around the country which were from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Universities and other higher education institutions can lead by example in a way that can change the thought processes of generations. The adoption of accessible information and communication and technology procurement policies and procedures in Australian universities has been a long work in progress with contributions from many people with lived experience, as we heard, and expertise within and outside the higher education sector.

This has a long history. In 2002 the then Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, which is now the Australian Human Rights Commission, hosted a forum with representation from 39 of our universities. The focus was to investigate why there were a growing number of formal or informal complaints relating to access to curriculum materials. The result was the establishment of guidelines on information access for students with print disabilities which was then endorsed by the Australian Vice Chancellor’s committee which is now Universities Australia. At this time it was noted that there was work to be done with members on policies and procedures relating to procurement.

Now, some 20 years later, we have seen immense growth in the digitisation of services of learning and communication in our higher education institutions and society, more broadly. This brings both new opportunities and obstacles. Technology can include individuals with disability but it can also be deeply exclusionary. The opportunity is that digital communications technology can provide new ways for people with disability and others to connect and participate in community life which includes studying at university, and the obstacle is that for this to happen the technology we use must be accessible for everyone. The Australian Human Rights Commission has identified accessible ICT procurement as an ongoing and pressing issue which needs serious attention in Australia now and in the future. This includes in our education system to bring us in line with our international commitments under the United Nations Convention of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The relevant articles of the convention are article 24 relating to education and, in particular, item 5, ensuring access to general tertiary education, and there are also comments made in relation to the need for accessibility in general comment No.2 and in article 9 which reinforces the accessibility of information and communication including ICT should be achieved from the outset. That is, that when we design ICT it should include people with disability at the start, not halfway through, not at the end.

In 2021 the Australian Human Rights Commission released the human rights and technology final report. The report was the culmination of a major project on new and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, and was undertaken by my then colleague, the Human Rights Commissioner, Mr Ed Santow. The report highlights that the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities had stated it is unacceptable to use public funds to create or perpetuate the inequality that inevitably results from inaccessible services and facilities. Applying this requirement to Australia, we need to realise that to comply with the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities,there are accessibility obligations relating to ICT. The human rights and technology report primarily focuses on government adoption of policies and procedures that would ensure technology complies with Australian Standard EN 301549 and WCAG 2.1. It is easily able to be understood that the responsibility to create accessibility from the outset and to avoid perpetuating inequity should extend to industries and organisations who are recipients of significant sums of money from government in terms of funding and this includes our universities.

It is for these reasons that the development of this Accessible ICT Procurement Implementation Guide is so timely, relevant and important to upholding and recognising the human rights of people with disability, including the right to access digital technologies and services in our higher education institutions, both as students and as employees.

It is also important to note that it is a pivotal time for the developers, ie, the vendors of ICT products and services, with the strong shift towards compliance with standards like ASEN 301549 and WCAG 2.1 from governments and large institutions, we will see that ICT products and services in the future are accessible as they can be designed in a way which includes everyone. This is important.

I commend the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training, the National Disability Coordination Office Program, the Council for Australasian University Directors of IT, Vision Australia and Intopia for working together in a collaborative manner which included relying upon the lived experience of people with disability to action the recommendations that are contained within Vision Australia's Online but Off-track Report which was published in 2018. This type of investment in coordinated responses to systemic issues in our tertiary institutions is important. It can change the lives of people for generations. I look forward to seeing our universities adopt the concepts and ideas from this implementation guide now and into the future. I am delighted to be asked to launch the guide and hope that we have a fruitful discussion on what is an important human rights issue now and in the future. Thanks, Matt.

MATT: Thank you so much, Ben. It is great to see and to hear that the work of CAUDIT and ADCET is aligning with the priorities and the policy innovations associated with these issues and the Australian Human Rights Commission, and the general responsiveness to what is a rapidly changing technology environment.

I might give a brief reflection on how things have changed across time. Ben made reference to guidelines developed by the Australian Vice Chancellor's Committee back in the early 2000s. And I think what we're seeing with these guidelines is a move towards a more mature, more integrated and more embedded approach to accessible procurement. We should, perhaps, see these current guidelines as a point in time milestone towards greater inclusion, but this is by no means a destination in its own right. Thank you, Ben, for being part of this launch and recognising the importance of inclusive procurement.

I would next like to introduce Bruce Maguire, who is lead policy advisor at Vision Australia, to speak with us about the history behind this work and the online report. Bruce, as lead policy advisor with Vision Australia, focuses on the development of the organisation’s public policy positions on issues that affect people who are blind or have low vision. In 2017-18, Bruce led Vision Australia's research into the barriers that university students who are blind or have low vision experience when using online learning systems. Bruce has had a professional involvement in the print disability field for over 35 years and has served on various national and international committees. He was president of the roundtable on International Access for People with Print Disabilities Inc from 1994 to ’96 and has been Chair of the Australian Braille Authority on several occasions, most recently from 2006-2010. I will now hand over to Bruce to also be part of this launch. Thank you, Bruce.

BRUCE MAGUIRE: Thank you, Matt, and good morning, everyone. I first want to acknowledge the Wallumedegal clan of the Darug nation. I’m on their land today and I pay my respects to their elders, and I extend those respects to any First Nations people who are participating in this even.

I begin my remarks by quoting the concluding lines of a poem that appeared in a book called Songs of Light which was published in 1935: “For surely as I breathe and move and as the heaven shines above, as follows day the night, each honest act of mercy done, each course of loving duty run, each aspiration launched or won, though fruitless seems the cost, all noble things we do and dare must fruitful be sometime somewhere and never can be lost.”

This poem was written by Matilda Anne, better known as Tilly Aston. In 11 days’ time on November 1, we commemorate the 75th anniversary of her death. She was born in 1873 with sight in only one eye. By the time she was seven, she had become totally blind. Tilly Aston was a pioneer in advocacy for the blind community and in her approach to advocacy and disability generally, she anticipated by three quarters of a century the contemporary social model that was introduced in the early 1970s.

You will recall that in a nutshell, the social model of disability asserts that people who have impairments experience disability because - and only because - of barriers created by society, and that people who experience disability themselves are the only people qualified to determine what is best for us and how we should live our lives.

Tilly Aston’s special connection with our event today is that she was the first blind person in Australia to obtain a senior school certificate, and in around 1892 she became the first blind person in Australia to enrol in university study. She successfully completed the first year of her BA degree and she also completed a number of second year subjects. But the almost total absence of braille textbooks at the time meant that she could not continue and she was compelled to withdraw from university. That was a decision that left her feeling so discouraged and despondent and burdened with such a sense of personal failure that her health declined and she became quite seriously ill for several months.

Tilly Aston went on to establish an association of braille writers, a braille library and the Association for the Advancement of the Blind. She became the first blind teacher in Victoria as well as being a concert giving pianist and singer. She had a worldwide circle of friends thanks to her fluency in Esperanto and she was known as Australia's blind poet because of her four published collections of verse, as well as numerous sketches and short stories.

But despite a life of flourishing and fulfilment and legacy of monumental achievement, Tilly Aston never did obtain the university degree that she dreamed of as a blind teenager. Crossfade, it’s late 2014 or early 2015 and I'm having a telephone conversation with one of our new staff members. She is telling me that she recently made the difficult and gut-wrenching decision to withdraw from her university studies because as a blind person she found it impossible to use the online learning system. The tears tinged her words as she spoke about her discouragement and despondency and her feeling of personal failure. I said that studying at university should be a joyous celebration of the pursuit of knowledge and the getting of wisdom, not a resilience stress test or a battle for survival.

By 2017 this initial conversation had become a chorus of variations on a theme and we felt that it was important that we undertake some research to find out more about the experiences of university students who are blind or have low vision. So we designed an online survey and promoted it as widely as we could. The results of our research are presented and discussed in our report titled Online but Offtrack, Barriers to Online Learning Experience by University Students who are Blind or have Low Vision, as has been mentioned. The report has a forward from then Disability Discrimination Commissioner, Alastair McEwin. Some of you may have already read the report, but if you haven’t and would like to, then you can find it on Vision Australia's website or you can contact me directly and I would be very happy to send you a copy. Of the 35 current or recent university students who responded to the online survey, 34 said that they encountered accessibility barriers when attempting to use the online learning systems that were essential to their study. Some students, like Tilly Aston 125 years before, found that the barriers were so intractable that they had no choice but to withdraw from studies. When describing their experiences with online learning systems, students used words and phrases like "awful", "I couldn't participate", "inaccessible", "unusable" and "impossible to use it".

When these barriers, due to the inherent inaccessibility of online learning systems, were added to other barriers, the result was frequently a traumatic experience. One student summed it up this way: “I spent years at university constantly trying to overcome barriers, online, offline, you name it. I'm finished now and I never want to set foot inside a university again as long as I live. I'm totally repulsed by the idea of further study. It was a deeply traumatic experience for me and I have emotional scars that may never heel.”

I first presented the findings of our research on September 30, 2018, during the Disability and Accessibility Conference that had been organised by the National Union of Students and over the following months we presented and discussed the research with various groups and organisations and we received a spectrum of responses to the ten recommendations that were included in our report. From the beginning, Darlene McLennan and her colleagues from ADCET have been tireless champions of change. They're united with us in the conviction that consistent sector-wide accessible ICT procurement policies and practices will eliminate some of the worst barriers that students who are blind or have low vision face in pursuing higher education. Tilly Aston's words carry across the decades and they don’t fade with time. In producing this implementation guide we have dared to do a noble thing.

It is a very proud moment for me personally and it is a proud moment for Vision Australia as an organisation to have the privilege of joining with Ben and Matt and ADCET and Intopia and the many others who have contributed to the guide and enabled this event today. The students who participated in our research have placed their trust in us to bear witness to their experiences by leading a process of transformation. We all bear a responsibility to use our role and our capacity to apply this Accessible ICT Procurement Implementation Guide and make it bear fruit by melting away accessibility barriers. We can and we will become fellow travellers with Tilly Aston on the journey towards equality, independence, and full inclusion. Thank you very much, Matt.

MATT: Thank you, Bruce. And I think I probably speak for everyone here today to say wow, thank you so much for that. That was incredible. Thank you for affirming for us all that the purposes of higher education include the joy of knowledge and the acquisition of wisdom. And reminding us that for many highly capable people experiencing disability, there are unnecessary barriers to their full and equal participation. As this – the collection of Tilly and her stories inspire us, it reminds us we have come a long way since the late 1800s. But we have still got a long way to go. My hope and my faith is that this Accessible Procurement Guide will get us a little bit further along to resolving the underlying accessibility problems that are evident in modern ICT systems and environments. So, again, thank you, Bruce, and incredible.

Next I introduce Neil Jarvis, who is senior digital accessibility consultant at Intopia, to share an overview of the guide and how it can be used. And Neil was one of the guide’s authors. Neil is a digital accessibility obsessive with over 20 years’ experience for working for not for profit, government and private sector organisations. He has played a leading role in the international campaign for the adoption and implementation of the Marakesh Treaty, an international copyright exceptions instrument, helping to end the book famine experienced by blind and low vision people around the world. He was also a leading member of the transforming Braille group, an international consortium, which designed and helped bring to market the world’s first electronic Braille device for less than USD 500. He is a past president of the roundtable on information access for people with print disabilities, and spent 10 years on the board of the Daisy Consortium which is a leading organisation in the field of inclusive publishing. Neil is a totally blind person and is, therefore, reliant on software and hardware which are digitally accessible. I hand over to you, Neil. Thank you.

NEIL JARVIS: Thank you very much, Matt, and Kia ora, everybody, as we say here in New Zealand. I'm based in Wellington, New Zealand, and I work with Intopia, and along with my colleague, Andrew Arch, we both wrote the guide that we are launching today.

While this kind of work is probably bread and butter, in many ways, to Intopia, we believed it was important to write the guide which potential users wanted, not the one we could write for any organisation. To determine what was required, we did the following before we wrote a single word. We held interviews with a range of stakeholders to learn about their experiences, good and bad, of ICT procurement and the consequences of inaccessible IT software and equipment.

We spoke with end-users, as well as with those involved in the procurement process. We spoke to a number of subject matter experts across the sector. We learned what they needed from a guide like this and what would help them - what would have helped them up to now. We heard a number of personal stories which helped us to illustrate the issues from a real world perspective and which brought the human experience into what all too often is thought of as a technology problem. The stories which Bruce told a few moments ago were good examples of that.

We examined procurement related documents from a wide range of institutions. These included procurement policies, accessibility guidelines, diversity and inclusion policies and processes, and a representative sample of action plans. There are a lot of those. We looked at comparable organisations around the world and what they do, and we drew on their experiences to inform our advice about good practice and the pitfalls to avoid.

We took part in fortnightly meetings with our colleagues and project sponsors and every month for three months we met with the advisory panel so that our thinking and, later, the drafts of our report could be considered, critiqued and feedback received. The final outcome was the guide that we are launching today.

Let me take you through what the guide consists of. There's the introduction to the guide which is an overview of the guide's components, its purpose, the background to the preparation, and things like that. We did a document on accessibility of core applications used in higher education, advice and information on accessibility features in commonly used documents and application systems. We felt that was a good starter for those who hadn't had that before.

We produced a large number of sample accessible procurement questions, questions to ask prospective vendors during the procurement process. If you don't ask the right question, you won't get the right responses. We produced a document with some accessibility stories, the real world examples I mentioned earlier from students and lecturers facing barriers to accessibility. Then we produced a document which we called the clause bank. It was a document containing sample wording of accessibility related clauses in documents used throughout the procurement cycle. Then we produced a document that talks about embedding awareness and understanding of accessibility and the methods that you can use to do that.

Then there was a document which was an introduction to ICT, some basic advice designed for procurement staff who may not have previously experienced this topic. Many people working in procurement have never heard of assistive technology. We supplied a document that talks about the legislation and specifically is relevant to accessibility, education and information access. We produce a document that outlined the kind of risks that need to be considered when assessing risks relating to the lack of accessibility. So what happens if you don’t provide it? What are the risks you are taking on by doing that? And there are different levels of risks for different kinds of technologies.

We produced a document which outlined the standards specific to accessibility and which are relevant to ICT related procurement. And then we produced a document which talked about the things that are called - we refer to them as ACRs or VPATs. These are accessibility compliance reports and voluntary product accessible templates. These are the things that many vendors will supply to you as evidence that they are taking accessibility seriously. We wanted to produce a report that explains what an ACR or a VPAT does and what it's for and how to interpret the information that vendors will put into those documents. The main part, in many ways, was the waypoints in accessible procurement document which we produced which takes you step-by-step through every stage of the procurement process. The last thing is a report with suggestions for next steps and recommendations.

Where to from here? It is important to understand that this guide, we know it is going to be circulating widely and it is important to understand that it is just the next step in the process. We know that it will be taken on and will be used by many, many organisations, but there is much more to do once the guide is embedded in people's thinking. We have been delighted to be part of this project. It is something we have really enjoyed professionally and personally and we are very grateful to have been asked to contribute. Thanks very much, Matt.

MATT: Thank you, Neil, and thanks for joining us from across the ditch today. Again, this is not just a localised collaboration; it is an international collaboration. And what you remind me of, Neil, is that the process often is as important as the product and what we have heard of is a truly collaborative approach that aligns with the needs of key users. To my mind, It is not a guide that sits on the periphery of ICT decision-making on Vision Australia or some websites, but it’s held and owned by CAUDIT, a peak body, the Council of Australian Directors of IT. And that, to me, is a tremendous innovation that shows where some of these barriers sit in terms of the ICT decision-making process and where the responses and sollutions might be.

For those that may not have had an opportunity to look around and look at the guide, the clause bank is a tremendous innovation. Neil, I think, again reminding us that if you don't ask the right questions, you won't get the right outcomes is a critical insight in this work overall. Neil also indicated that this is just a stepping stone. It’s a step towards the implementation of the ideal of accessibility. Next we are going to hear from Steve Johnston, who is Director of Strategic Procurement at CAUDIT to talk about CAUDIT’s adoption of this resource central to the implementation of it. Steve joined CAUDIT in 2011 having departed Edith Cowan University after 11 years of service. At ECU, or Edith Cowan, he held a number of senior IT roles, including manager of IT infrastructure and manager of IT Project Governance. He has over 15 years of experience in higher education, previously working for both Curtin University and the University of Western Australia as well. Stephen has got a Bachelor of Engineering in computer systems, he is a senior member of the Australian Computer Society and is recognised by the society as a certified professional. He's a graduate of the 2009 CAUDIT Leadership Institute. So without too much more by way of introduction, over to you, Steve.

STEPHEN JOHNSTON: Thank you, very much. I would like to start by acknowledging the Whadjuk Noongar people as the traditional custodians of Perth, the lands on which I live and work, and their elders past and present. My name is Steve Johnston. I'm the Director of Strategic Procurement at CAUDIT, the Council of Australasian University Directors of IT. We're a membership organisation with members across Australia and New Zealand, including all of the Australian universities and many research organisations across the country with a peak body for ICT within higher education and research in the region.

CAUDIT was first established about 40 years ago when a group of IT directors started to share experiences to improve the delivery of IT services within their organisations. We have grown to 65 members influencing a budget of some $2.9 billion per annum. Our mission is to enable the application of digital capabilities for education and research.

It has been a privilege for us to participate in such a meaningful project. I would like to thank David from the NDCO program, and Darlene from ADCET, and everyone involved for thinking of us when this need was identified. CAUDIT supports our member representatives and their teams through the provision of a broad range of services that foster collaboration, leadership and good practice.

My role involves working closely with members and vendors to negotiate arrangements that benefit everyone within the sector. Often this involves securing the best possible price. It also provides the opportunity to influence good practice. This project aligns perfectly with our mission and objectives. It makes sense that when we buy ICT hardware and software and services, we leave no-one behind. We recognise the different needs that everyone may have. The guide gives substantial and in-depth guidance about developing accessible ICT procurement policies and procedures for higher indication providers, and we have been delighted to have been involved in its development and to share it with the sector.

Some universities have already advanced or are advancing related to accessible procurement and some are emerging. Collectively, we can make a difference in the vendor and procurement landscape. We have identified options for CAUDIT via our strategic procurement work to encourage more vendors to meet the requirements of AS EN301549 and WCAG 2.1 and other standards supporting the sector’s engagement in accessible ICT procurement. We're adapting our own vendor checklists and processes so that when procurement happens on a national basis we will ensure that accessibility is front of mind, setting the standard for expectations of software and hardware, those that supply them and how we configure them for staff, students and researchers.

We know that this will not be an overnight transformation of all vendors and there will be some that will need to agree to roadmaps towards conformance. We also recognise that many vendors are already addressing accessibility in a meaningful way. In the future, we hope to see every ICT product or service that universities purchase incorporate access by design and that this will become business as usual across the country.

We have committed to play our part in the continuous improvement of ICT practice addressing the concerns raised in Vision Australia's Online and Offtrack report and continuously raised and highlighted by the writing team in Intopia throughout this project. We are delighted to be part of the launch with Accessible ICT Procurement Implementation Guide. It is an excellent start. We have much work to do. We will continue to work with ADCET and other parties continuing to develop our understanding for the benefit of all. Thank you.

MATT: Thank you. Thank you, Stephen. Again, it’s the hallmark of this resource to my mind is the collaboration between those professionals working in the disability sector and those professionals working in the ICT secotr coming together in the spirit of inclusion and collaboration. Thank you so much, Stephen.

Thanks again also to Bruce and Ben and Neil for your presentations today. It has been an absolute delight and treat to be part of this and to hear from you all. On that note, it is our collective delight to officially launch the guide. We hope that it becomes a living document that the sector will collaborate with us on and CAUDIT to keep current and useful across its lifespan.

The guide is now available at the website that Darlene is going to share and just has shared in the chat. It’s caudit.edu.au/accessible-it-procurement. And every registered participant will get a copy of that and we can email as well.

Thanks, everyone, for coming today. That brings this launch to an end. Again, it has been an absolute delight to be part of this. Huge congratulations to everyone involved in developing this work and this guide. Let's look forward to a future where accessible ICT procurement leads to a more accessible environment for students and staff across the sector.