Hello and welcome to this special edition ADCET podcast. As ADCET celebrates its 20th birthday year, we asked 20 past and present staff from across the tertiary sector to reflect on some of the significant changes that they've witnessed in the last 20 years and to ask them what they'd like to see in the next 20. Here's what they had to say.

La Trobe University, Anthony Gartner

I think the biggest change that I've noticed in the last, well, it's 15 years that I've been in the sector has been the advent of new technology that has made an incredible difference to the experience of staff and students. We're doing things at the moment that we simply couldn't have done a couple of years ago. We have transitioned from a model of dependency where students were dependent on the university to do everything in terms of their access to information and digital technology, to a model where we're actually passing on the skills to students. We're enabling them to learn the skills and strategies that they need to be digitally literate in the emerging world. My hope is that that means that students will be able to compete in the open job market more effectively and have those conversations with prospective employers about what they need for reasonable adjustments and how their needs can be met in a very easy and simple way. And I think the technology we're seeing at the moment, that what's emerged during the COVID pandemic has been quite exceptional. And from my perspective, it's been delightful to see how students have been empowered by that technology and how it has advantaged them. What I'd like to see in the next 20 years is a three-pronged approach. That is a culture of inclusion that is built into universities, a culture of universal design, both for learning and for every other aspect of university operations, and the provision of reasonable adjustments in an easy and streamlined way. I think if we can deliver those three prongs, those three aspects, then we actually will create an environment that has the potential for people to participate on an equal basis. I think those three prongs are really important, particularly the universal design piece, as we build that capacity. We've been talking about it for a long time, but I think we need to move to do it. And as we do that, we need to keep providing the reasonable adjustments. But perhaps over time, that need will be less because adjustments will be available, people won't have to ask for them because they'll be there. And we'll build a culture of inclusivity for all people. That's what I'd really like to see in the next 20 years.

TAFE South Australia, Jen Cousins

Okay, I think the most significant thing in the last 20 years for me has been the recognition of the diversity of students that we have in education and training across the tertiary sector. I think previously we boxed people up fairly significantly, as in or out of the tertiary sector, whereas now I think we're recognising that all students, regardless of whether they have a disability or not, actually have a range of learning support needs. And I think in understanding that, we've actually started to understand that students with disability actually have a rightful place and entitlement to be a part of that process, just as we make accommodations for a whole range of other diverse aspects of student cohorts. So, I think for me, that's been a big game changer in the last 20 years, that people are starting to understand that students with disabilities aren't an extra amount of work, that they have a place and they bring something to a class or to education and training courses that is valuable and provides other students with opportunities to experience all aspects of diversity that may not have previously been experienced in the tertiary sector. In the next 20 years, I would really love to see universal design, particularly universal design for learning, be embraced and embedded as a learning theory and something that underpins all of the way we design, develop, deliver and assess training and education across the tertiary sector. And I think if we can use UDL not just for that teaching and learning aspect, but that we bring UDL design thinking into all aspects of what we do so into the procurement areas, the development of our facilities, industry, education, part of the process of acquiring technology, using the technologies to support learning for a range of students. That would be the ultimate kind of goal that we see in every aspect of the tertiary sector, not just perhaps the focus that it currently is, a lot around teaching and learning. So, for me, that would be the one wish I have for the next 20 years.

Deakin University, Matt Brett

So, in my view, ADCET has played an incredible role for disability in Australian higher education and in the 20 years that it's been operating, which is an incredible achievement. So, congrats Darlene, congrats Jane, congrats everyone that's been involved with that. I think there's been a real shift in the way in which disability is understood and positioned within higher education. We've gone from something which is maybe more peripheral, something which is kind of a special thing on the side, to something that's now more embedded in the way in which the sector operates. And I think that's an incredible achievement, given the sort of pace of social change can be very slow. So that's fantastic. And again, ADCET I think has played an incredible role in providing staff across the sector, whether it be practitioners or students and other staff, academics, et cetera, with the tools to be more confident in the way in which they think about and approach disability. And I think just to provide a little indication of how that plays out, 20 years ago, since 2002, when I was in meetings in universities, and I've been at a lot of meetings in my career, there's so much fun happening, all these meetings. Often, I was the only voice in the room sort of raising questions around sort of disability. But I go into sort of meetings now, whether it be within my current university, Deakin University or other cross sectoral kind of meetings, and I can see that I don't have to be the person flying the flag for disability all the time because it's normalised now. Maybe not everyone, but lots of people are aware of and are pushing for disability inclusion. I think that's a fantastic achievement that ADCET has played a really important role in nurturing. And it means that I can put my attention on disability in other areas, which I still do, where I can. In terms of what comes next for ADCET, let's hope that the next 20 years ADCET really supports a shift in the way in which disability is kind of positioned in higher ed right now. In my view, we're still very much beholden to a fixed set of higher education standards and reasonable adjustments to those standards themselves. And I think there's some really important work to be done to critically examine the way in which those standards can be set with greater flexibility, still rigorous, still really concerned with the high level of quality but making sure that those standards in and of themselves are not embedding kind of structural discrimination or structural exclusion of people with disabilities, such that every person sort of entering higher education, no matter what they're doing, can have the curriculum sort of find a way of meeting their future aspirations and their learning needs in a way that's very different to the sort of reasonable adjustment paradigm that we've got at the moment. And I think ADCET will continue to sort of nudge and support the sector to be able to be more inclusive of students with disabilities and staff with disabilities as well. And I'll leave it there. Thanks for the opportunity to rabbit on about my love for ADCET.

University of Tasmania, Doug McGinn

Thank you very much for allowing me to have a bit of a chat today. I just want to talk a little bit about the changes in the sector. As a blind person, I want to talk a little bit about access to printed material. The major improvements that have happened in the last five years, ten years, 20 years. 20 years ago, here at University of Tasmania, we had a team of casuals that would literally photocopy textbooks, use OCR software, optical character recognition software, and convert them into text sorry, convert that text into electronic format. There would be lots of mistakes and those casuals would then take a fair amount of time to look at the finished material and turn that into materials that we sent out to our students. The service was actually maintained by myself off the side of my desk. I was a single practitioner working in Hobart, and part of my role was to run the transcription service. I literally had a listing of publishers all around Australia, Pearson's, Butterworth, and I would email and phone up my contacts and ask them whether they have electronic copies of materials that they could send to me. Sometimes they would say yes, sometimes they would say no, but they would allow us to copy the material. It has just changed markedly, not just for print disabled students that are vision impaired, cohorts of students who are print disabled, any students with a specific learning disability, for example, who can now access pretty well all of their material. We certainly did used to scan a lot of material onto the web on our library pages, and a lot of that was inaccessible. So, I think the major change in my work life has certainly been the access for accessible material for our students, whether they have a print disability or not. They can download the material electronically, change it on their own devices so that it can be more easily read. I just want to talk a little bit about the changes that's in the next 20 years, and the two things we're going to talk about have certainly been talked about before at Pathways conferences, ATEND and other forums. When I look at the austed list, you look at the…, I quite often look at the electronic signatures and, possibly because I have a computer that talks to me some of the other users may not necessarily look at the electronic signatures, but the variety of different titles for the same positions around Australia, Disability Liaison Officers, Disability Advisors, Accessibility Advisors, Inclusion. I would really like to see the professionalisation of our sector at some stage. We look at psychologists, we look at social workers, we have an abundance of talent within our area, and yet I think we're still a little bit disparate with regard to policies and processes that we follow. All of our institutions have learning access plans or individual education plans of some form, but there's still such differences. And I think if there was a consolidation of the processes, but also the professionalisation of our sector, I think we would certainly be a lot more stable and have a lot more strength in that. The second area that I just want to talk a little bit about, I think ADCETs has a chance to provide specialist services for disability staff like myself. We don't have a big enough group of specialist staff at University of Tasmania for things like assistive software, assistive technology, or specialisation for antidiscrimination within education, postsecondary education. For us to be able to pull in specialists at certain times would be amazing, and obviously the benefit for the staff, the institution, and especially the students concerned. So certainly, that's the areas that I would really like to see some changes in these next year’s coming up.

TAFE Queensland, Brandon Taylor

Okay, well, for the past 20 years for me, significant improvements certainly have been made in the implementation of reasonable adjustments in the classroom and the training programs. I think as a practitioner, we've seen massive change both in the marketplace amalgamation of institutes, and sadly, we did see massive reduction in student support services. It was a very difficult time for practitioners. It caused us a lot of uncertainty, and of course, our students at the time had less services and support. I'd like to see in the future the disability practitioner role, move away from the admin and processing and more to a guidance and consultative position that allows more time with teachers and trainers. And to support that, I'd like to see a clear professional development pathway for practitioners. I think, as well, for all the progress that we've seen for our students, I still don't think it's been enough. I want to see more students progressing into employment. I'd like to see this to be more choice when it comes to study options. And unfortunately, we've still got training providers denying students opportunity and support. So, it's been 30 years since the DDA commenced and I still don't think that we're as far on as we should be. However, there is positive there because I do encourage any student at the moment, whether you're a current student or a recent graduate, take advantage of the skill shortages across Australia at the moment. Get your foot in the door, show employers what your value is because it is a job seeker market.

University of South Australia, Dallas Dunn

So, I reckon I've been at UniSA for 15-16 years. I think two of the biggest changes I've noticed, one is assistive technology, that's constantly changing, it's really hard to keep up with, but that's a good thing the technology is getting better and better for students with print disabilities, etc. But I think the biggest is the attitude in the academics from the point I started, when you distribute access plans, make contact with them again, the student has an access plan, they can get extensions, extra time, very, very rarely any kickback from academics. Now they seem to have embraced and well, this is real, this is happening, we need to accommodate, to the point where sometimes you get a response from academics, more often than not, what can we do to assist the student? Yeah, that to me has been really positive from our university's perspective. Nothing about reasonable adjustments is black and white. How long is an extension, how long is a piece of string? But they're always willing, you know, I'd say 99% of academics are just willing to sit down, have a chat. You give them a bit of advice and sort of encourage them to communicate with the students, see what their personal situation is at the moment before considering this is a long extension, but okay, this has happened in their life, you will give them an extension that might be a bit longer than normal. So, the overall positive approach by academics, it's not perfect, but it's a huge change from when I first started here. So, to me that's positive. They're working with us, and we work with them. And I suppose the next 20 years what I'd like to see, I think I'll be well and truly retired by then, is that adoption of universal design for learning throughout tertiary institutions. Just because in the long run that will make the role of academic well, they have less to do. I mean, we'll be contacting them now, like can we get transcriptions for these lectures? If that's automatically embedded and embedded with good technology, they'll be saving everyone's time and students won't be waiting for transcriptions. You know, getting behind, getting a bit anxious about the fact that lecture was Monday, I've got an assignment based on that, you know, next week I'll have to wait a couple of days to get my transcription. So, I'd really like to see the UDL Just family entrenched in every tertiary education system.

Curtin University, Erica Schurmann

So, in terms of what have been the most significant changes across the sector for the last 20 years, obviously there's the introduction of the Disability Standards for Education and the subsequent reviews of their efficacy to ensure that students with disability can access and participate in education on an equitable basis to others. It's been great to see the recommendations from the 2020 review focus on strengthening the knowledge and capability of educators and putting more emphasis on the accountability by education providers to meet those standards. There was also obviously a rapid shift to the delivery of online content for learning engagement through the COVID pandemic which created issues for everyone but particularly affected people with disability when that content was being created without consideration of accessibility of that content being front of mind. And then the third thing would be better, but obviously a long way from being perfect awareness of disability and considerations around what constitutes reasonable adjustments and inherent requirements for course participation. I don't necessarily think though, that there's been a significant shift yet towards better attitudes or outcomes from an overall disability inclusion perspective more broadly across the sector. So, what changes would I like to see in the next 20 years? I would love to see accessibility become a primary consideration at the start of all regular meetings across the board in the same way that health and safety gets included on the agenda in most forums. Let's ensure that everyone's considering this and deliberately designing for difference from the get-go, because from the big picture perspective, disability should not be a barrier for success when you're at university. This would fundamentally mean scaffolding a proactive approach to embedding universal design into the design and delivery across all of university functions, so that anyone who's attending our campuses can participate in everything that we offer on an equitable basis. Whether that's from the perspective of the staff member, a student, a visitor or an academic, so that everything is available and accessible and usable for everyone. As an example there, not being able to see and read from your computer screen, it might be an individual impairment, but if universities don't have the appropriate procurement practices in place to ensure that the accessibility of the software platforms they're purchasing and hosting information on has been considered, this might be incompatible with screen reading technology, which then creates disability for that individual in the same way that not having course materials designed in an accessible manner up front is disabling. Other things like only providing printed materials and not captioning our videos, these things can create access barriers unless alternatives such as large print formats, audio descriptions and captioned video recordings are provided as well. This universal design approach helps to reduce the need for disabled people to ask for adjustments to support their participation, because that then doesn't help to improve access for anyone else for whom those adjustments might also be useful. We really need to recognise the fundamental human rights in relation to our attitudes and expectations regarding disability and addressing those ableist systems and processes which lead to disability considerations and adjustments being treated as something extra to be done on top of existing workloads. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities enshrines the right to equality and non-discrimination inclusive education, accessibility, justice, work and employment. And some of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals also aim to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education, promoting of lifelong learning opportunities for everyone, ensuring healthy lives and promoting wellbeing for all at all ages, full and productive employment, and decent work for all, promotion of peaceful, inclusive societies, access to justice for all and building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. If we can help to promote and deliver equal access to education across Australia in line with those Sustainable Development Goals and the Convention, we'd be doing really well. On that note, I'd love to see harmonisation across all Australian universities around the definitions regarding the inherent requirements for course participation and for these to be framed in an enabling and inclusive manner and not as a barrier to participation. It would be great to see more flexibility in offerings for participation in various aspects of mandatory coursework, such as work integrated learning, and practical fieldwork experiences so that part time options can be made available. This might be outside their scope of influence and control, but I'd still like to see it. I'd love to see compulsory disability and education on the disability standards awareness training being implemented. I think that's been recommended countless times following the standard reviews and other higher education research programs to help improve and develop consciousness in staff attitudes towards people with disability more broadly. If almost one in five Australians are living with some form of disability, there's a pretty good chance that you're already dealing with people with disability every day. You just might not have realised it, given that around 80% of disabilities are invisible. Other than that, of course, on that wish list would be better government funding to support the delivery of services, supports for students and staff so that we can offer seamless accessible services that people know that they can turn to if they're in need of assistance for their particular circumstances. We could probably do with better support pathways for graduates, but with disability transitioning into employment there as well. And finally, echoing the calls from the current disability commissioner, Ben Gauntlet, we'd love to see the Disability Discrimination Act be thoroughly reviewed so that meaningful penalties apply for breaches where it's been shown that discrimination has occurred against a person or people with disability. It's been in place for 30 years now, but our employment rates for people with disability haven't changed over that period of time, even with increased participation of people with disability in higher education and who are graduating from our institutions.

TAFE New South Wales, Jody Hoger

So, over the last 20 years, some of the things that I've seen change and improve in the way that we support students with disability and also support the sector in improving the way that we are more inclusive in general. A lot of it is around attitude and the willingness now that we have with our teachers and support teams, as opposed to 20 years ago and even 30 years ago. There's always been that level of willingness, but it's just the net’s so much broader. And I think too, one of the other changes that I've really been able to witness is that students are starting to become more disability confident and be able to self-direct and really work within that social model of disability rather than sort of coming to us and almost needing us to tell them what they need, and I think that's a massive move forward. I think that it's really important that people are becoming more disability confident in general and being able to self-advocate only helps us provide a better service in the way that we can support those students in their learning journeys. The things that I would love to see happen in the next 20 years. I would love to see that we didn't have to advocate anymore for digital accessibility, that it just was there, it just happened, was easy, didn't matter what your learning style was, what assistive technology you used, that you could just engage with that digital environment and be able to just get on and learn rather than having to struggle with systems that aren't there yet or advocate to have those systems changed. From a disability practitioner perspective, the other thing that I would love to see happen over the next 20 years was that accessibility and usability was just embedded in all processes, policies, procedures. That it was just business as usual, whether it's in procurement or learning design, development of content, availability of resources, the platforms that we use, that it was just there, ready to go. And I think that that is achievable, having accessibility and inclusion embedded in the way we operate. Just so, again, people can focus on getting on and doing what they've enrolled to do, and that disability practitioners can get on and provide the support that students require, rather than time being taken up with those, I'm going to say extraneous, but incredibly important work around the advocacy and facilitating that change. But again, doing that takes us away from our fundamental roles, which is to support the students.

ADCET, Gabrielle O'Brien

I'm Gabrielle, an equity and disability practitioner from Queensland. I guess the biggest change I've seen is the focus on widening participation in higher education. In particular, the focus on underrepresented groups like First Nations people, low SES students and people with disability. They say you should be the change you want to see, and I have seen the way education transforms lives. I value the knowledge and innovation from my fellow practitioners and researchers and resources like ADCET. So, I hope to continue to contribute in the future. I also hope we as a nation continue to embrace authentic inclusion of diversity in all its forms. In the next 20 years, I would like to see the tertiary education sector renew its commitment to the equity agenda by creating welcoming, safe and vibrant places where everybody can fulfill their potential. And I hope ADCET continues to be a crucial part of this journey.

Newcastle University, Kay Dean

Looking back over the last 20 years, I see so much growth in our sector. 20 years ago, gosh, did we even have an email? We did, but we weren't communicating as practitioners as much as we are now. So, 20 years ago, we were really working more in isolation. And since then, through that period, I see us more working together as a group, sharing our best practice, sharing our resources. And a lot of that I put down to ADCET as a core resource that we've all been able to load up our resources, advertise our seminars, advertise events that we're planning and giving partners. So, it's been that cohesion that over the last 20 years I've seen us in the beginning with the DDA only ten years old, to us all learning what that really meant and the impact on our work, to growing together as we've learnt to communicate together and get together in person and share that practice and share our frustrations in our own institutions about that sometimes how difficult it is to put all these things in place for people. But looking forward to the next 20 years, I feel very passionate about, oh my goodness, can inclusive education be finally reached? Is this a goal for the next 20 years? We've all tried to make this happen within our own circumstances and together, inclusive education and inclusive employment practices as well, and an inclusive community. Is the next 20 years, is it possible? Is that what we're looking for? Can we together work towards this elusive inclusive environment where an academic might say, and would you like steak knives with that many large print, alternate format, reasonable adjustments? That it's just something that's mainstreamed and it's not a favour, that it's something that's provided by an employer, by an academic, by an institution in the community. So that physical and inclusive education and employment is what I'm really hoping in 20 years time when we do 40 years of ADCET that we might be able to say 20 years ago we were working together to find our way, we communicated, found each other, shared our best practice, shared our skills with each other through ADCET webinars and other things to now, look what we've done. There's other people working alongside us to create that inclusive education and employment and community environment. That's what I'm hope we're going to be able to talk about at the 40 year anniversary. So, my hope for the future is inclusivity. So, let's see how we go.

Deakin University, Lisa Kavanagh

So, what has been the most significant changes that I've seen in the last 20 years? There's been a few, and I suppose one of the biggest ones is that the number of students has certainly increased so much. And it's great that so many more students are seeing university as a genuine option, as it should be, because we all know the importance of education in terms of quality of life and life choices and independence. So that's been a significant change and an exciting change. Another change is how ubiquitous personal smart devices are and how technology has opened doors. So no longer having to contact a deaf student on a TTY or providing audio tapes for students with a vision impairment, students can now access support remotely and they can access information independently, which is really important. Another significant change, I think, has been the increasing community awareness and literacy re mental illness and mental health, and also the visibility and ownership of disability identity. That there's been so much change in how conversations around mental health or disability are so commonplace now. And that of course, doesn't mean that people with lived experience do not still continue to experience stigma or a range of other difficult circumstances. But that sort of evolution of society to be able to have much more respectful, considered and intelligent conversations on a range of issues and that people don't feel the need to hide in quite the same way, autistic people and other neurodiverse groups the same. And the deaf communities really owned their identity for a long time, so many thanks to trailblazers over a long period of time that disabilities is not a dirty word. Changes that I'd like to see happen in the next 20 years, well, DLOs have always got a long list of changes, so one would be a decrease in the systemic barriers to access and participation. So, a lot of processes and rules still exist that can inadvertently cause disadvantage and add fatigue and frustration for students and reduce the opportunities for considered discussions to identify fair and equitable outcomes. So those are certainly the bane of a DLOs life. Whilst most uni staff do an amazing job under very challenging circumstances, it can be difficult when time and workload can be a barrier for innovative outcomes. And so, in the next 20 years I would hope that staffing levels, staff development and awareness and staff workload can better reflect the diversity of student learners and their needs, especially for academic staff. It happens not so often these days, but there are still occasional times when I say treating everybody the same does not mean that you're treating everybody fairly and it would be super if that knowledge could be assumed. And my sense is that most of the time people would really like to be able to find creative solutions to difficulties, but they're often really hamstrung by just their work conditions. As much as technologies open doors, it's also still a significant barrier for many people and if digital platforms could be designed to be intuitive and accessible that would be amazing. Not just university platforms, but the platforms that students use, so whether that's about accessible eBooks or a whole range of things, it just makes such a difference in students having the confidence that they can access information. To see universal design principles implemented across campuses and curriculum design and assessment would be amazing. We know that students with a range of lived experiences are here and they'll keep coming, so including diversity as a core principle in all that universities do which makes such a huge difference. And if the recognition of the profession of disability staff and the services that support them, so services such as ADCET and the people who staff that, if there could be improvement in that area that would be amazing. So DLOs have an understanding of legislation, social justice principles, the importance of the voice of the student and their lived experience and the essential nature of that knowledge of the university environment, assistive technology, the ability to ask questions in a respectful and supportive manner to help the university meet its legal obligations and so much more. This is a skill set that should be valued and hopefully is much more so over the next 20 years.

Retired practitioner, Sondra Wibberley

Yes, an interesting question, what significant change or changes have there been in the last 20 years? There's been several, I would say, or numerous, but I would say fundamentally there's been a shift in philosophy in the sector which has resulted in a change from services for people with disabilities who are students at either a TAFE or university institution shift to their being provided on a right space as well as a need space, shifting away from reliance on the charity or medical model, although medical documentation is still provided, there has been a fundamental shift away to provision of services because of the students need but also their right to have them. And you will see this from the early days for those that were around then or those who didn't know, anyone who presented at a university in particular, or a TAFE college, but certainly in a university, if they had a significant disability, the first thing that would often happen is that they would be referred directly to the university counsellor for assistance. They would also be reliant on services that were provided externally by organisations specialising in their disability. So, for example, you get your materials transcribed if you're blind or visually impaired by the Royal Society for the Blind in Victoria or the Royal Blind Society or whatever state and territory you were in. Now we're seeing the institutions taking responsibility for quite a lot of the production of course materials and so forth. We've also seen the mobilisation of a disability service practitioner sector where we have staff who are providing this support to students with disabilities as a direct role rather than as an adjunct to existing roles like a counselling service, or a university nurse or someone who just happened to be the secretary in the admin office that was doing a lot of this sort of work in some institutions. So, we've seen quite a lot of change in that, and that was brought about largely by the implementation of the Disability Education Standards and obviously they were enshrined in the Disability Discrimination Act brought in in 1992. Certainly, technology has had a major role in shaping how services are delivered, how learning occurs. We're now having a lot of online classes as we know, and some service provision through other support services that the universities or TAFE colleges offer is also provided online. Administrative processes are now also provided online as our disability registration processes and the like, and the availability of mainstream and assistive technology to enable this has certainly had a major impact over the last 20 years. We've gone from a librarian hiding a book under the counter in their library so that a student with a disability, whether it be a visual impairment or a learning disability, can access it, to a situation now where a person can access library materials for their course in the comfort of their own home, using online platforms to do so. There's been quite a major change in that. And of course, this has been aided too by collaboration among disability service practitioners and others to band together to enable dialog about how to support students with disabilities, because these people many years ago were working in isolation at their institutions. But we've seen quite a significant change through networking at state and territory level and national level through the work of the National Disability Coordination Officer program and ADCET and ATEND to enable people to have a voice who are working in this sector, facilitate the sharing of information and resources and ideas in a supportive way, to enable development of really improved practice in accommodating students with a range of disabilities. That certainly wasn't the case when I started as a young disability advisor many years ago. You just had to manage the best you could and talk to an occasional person over telephone. But now we've got wonderful email lists and websites and the answer resources that people can draw on and it's a much more collaborative approach now to providing services. We've also had important changes in the broader disability arena too with the advent of the National Disability Insurance Scheme that has facilitated provision of services that are ancillary on campus but nevertheless important like carer support and the like. And of course, there's been broader societal changes in things like building codes and so forth to facilitate changes to the physical environments that people operate in. What would I like to see in the next 20 years? I would love to see the disability service practitioner industry become recognised across the broader education system and across the government at various levels, but particularly at Commonwealth level with this to translate into things like equitable conditions of employment, consistent rates of pay, and a professional recognition in the institutions that a practitioner or practitioners work about their role. Unfortunately, I think there is still a situation where some student service providers are seen as being professionally superior to the disability service practitioners, who often have much higher caseloads and a significant level of responsibility in their work and are not recognised for it in the higher education pay structures and conditions of employment. There's been an ongoing issue, and I’d really like to see some positive change in that direction because I think the disability service practitioners have a significant role to play, and they often are fundamental to not only supporting students with disabilities, that's primarily why they're there, but also keeping universities and other institutions where they work out of court because of their knowledge of the disability discrimination laws and standards and other pertinent legislation that enables the student to be accommodated in accordance with those laws and reduces the amount of, shall I say, litigation that can occur at an institutional level if students feel that their needs and rights are not being accommodated correctly. I'd also like to see mandatory training of academic staff for assisting students with a range of disabilities. We've got wonderful resources available, and I know that there are some training programs that are offered an institutional level, and we do have some well trained and committed academics, but I think it needs to be a requirement of their employment to undergo this training, certainly if they're teaching and designing courses because of the complexity of issues around web accessibility, other forms of accessible communication and teaching methods that accommodate the increasing range of students with learning access needs. Certainly technology, I would like to see a greater reliance on it, but in a way that's enabling students to receive support that's developed in accordance with best practice guidelines whether they be developed through ADCET or the higher education, or the broader tertiary education sector, or through involvement with other bodies, such as the Roundtable on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities or other likeminded organisations developing best practice guidelines to enable provision of accessible course materials and other forms of information that institutions provide to people with all sorts of abilities and disabilities, including students.

National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, Tim Pitman

I think for me the most significant change I've seen over the last 20 years has been the real increase in participation for students with disability. So, if we just look at the last ten years, for example, ten years ago, about 40,000 students a year, most students with disability were participating in higher education, and now it's doubled to 80,000. That's a real and significant increase. And then if you further break it down and look at that, I think there are three things going on and they're all positive. The first thing, as I've said, is it represents a genuine, real increase of participation by students with disability. But I also think that this is reflective of more students disclosing their disabilities, so, in other words, these students actually were already there, but they weren't disclosing for reasons of stigma, fear of discrimination, or just saying, what's the point of disclosing because there's no one here to help me. So that's, I think, indicative of more positive attitudes towards students with disability and a realisation by the students themselves that there is a benefit to disclosing. And that's linked then to the third thing, which is I think particularly in key support areas such as disability support units, those units have become really good over the last 10-20 years at explaining to the students we're here, we can help you, and this is what we can do. So, we're getting a little bit of a virtuous circle of students realising that by disclosing they can get really good support from these disability support units, and also through the process of disclosing and getting the support, washing away some of that stigma and some of that discrimination, and that then also feeds back to positive loops which encourage even more students with disability into the sector. So, I'm not painting an entirely rosy picture. There are still significant barriers, there are still issues, but if we look back over the last 20 years, we can actually see that real and genuine increase in participation. If I look forward to the next ten or 20 years, then what I would really like to see is increased success by students with disabilities. So, we're seeing the students participate, we're seeing them enter, but compared to other student groups, we're still seeing higher rates of attrition in the first year, more units being failed, and lower rates of completion. So, what I’d like to see in the next 20 years is those students that are now getting in, succeeding and completing and going on. And if I could think of one thing that would be really supportive of that, it would be a greater uptake and a greater understanding of universal design for learning principles. UDL, in its essence, is saying that there is no one way that students learn, there's no one way that we need to teach this information to students and there's no one way that we need to assess or measure the student's success. It's about diverse ways of accessing the information, processing the information and demonstrating competency towards the course requirements. Universal design for learning helps all students, not just students with disability. It creates a diverse and engaged and connected learning environment. It helps students stay connected to their task, it helps students self-paced, it helps students deal with the very specific realities of their lives. Universities are embracing increasingly universal design for learning principles, but I would like to see more happening there and I think that is going to be key to ongoing success for these students with disabilities.

Victoria University, Lizzie Knight

So, I think the biggest change over the last 20 years in tertiary education in terms of support for students with disabilities, is really what I would call a kind of mind shift and I think there's some way to go, but I think that people are becoming aware of the nature of reasonable adjustments. Whereas I think in the early 2000s perhaps it was a less known concept, I think that it was also very much more medicalised. I think that different models of disability have become much more known, and I think that's evidence that disability awareness training actually does work. A lot of my work is on thinking about what commonly held notions and I think people now do understand, particularly in the tertiary sector, that medical models are not appropriate, and people have moved towards the social model of disability and for me that's fantastic. That's a really big move towards understanding that people like me with disability are to a certain extent disabled by structures and there can be emancipating reforms. But I do think there's someway to go. I think the social model by Oliver was never meant to be the kind of final articulation and I think that we really need to move forward and move towards either something like different understanding of how we all live in this world, and we are all disabled by different things. And I think that one of the biggest events, I think in understanding how inclusive world higher education and vet can be is the pandemic. I think the pandemic’s been critical in thinking that actually no, there are different ways of doing things, we can make that event available online, we can send things in, have a backup plan in case someone gets ill, in case they can't do it. And I think it's also the previous idea that conferences haven't been able to be effective in any other way that face-to-face full day, which can be extremely fatiguing, extremely sensorially overwhelming. I think that finally we've pulled away from that notion that there's only one way to do things and I think for higher education and for a bit less for VET, but perhaps we're on a longer journey for vocational education. The idea that higher education can be done by distance would be transformative for, for me as an undergraduate student in terms of fatigue and mobility, and I would have made lots of different choices if that was possible. So, I think that almost it's beyond our control and one of the biggest changes. But I think that the first move of a mindset shift away from a fully medicalised understanding of disability was important and the second shift has been literally the environment, the environment made difficult for us in those pandemic years. We learned how to cope, and we learned that we can all be disabled by our environment, as we all were in the pandemic. And I think that that's something that we can work from, and work and think about, you know, what's next and how we all live our lives and study and how we want to engage with tertiary institutions and education. In the next 20 years, I hope to see some movement down the road of understanding that actually higher education and VET can be done differently and that we need to think about individual needs. I think concepts from the US like universal design for learning and also concepts that come from that, like universal and structural design, can make tertiary education better and particularly more accessible and inclusive for all of us.

Former Disability Services Manager, Rick Boffa

Over the last 20 years in the tertiary education sector, I think one of the biggest changes that I've seen is how we approach service provision for students with print disabilities. When I started in the sector around about 2005, I was always disappointed that we couldn't provide alternatively formatted study materials for students with print disabilities. In less time than two weeks, that was the best turnaround time that we could do, and if something went wrong, a considerably longer time than that. And that wasn't something that I felt comfortable with. Students with print disabilities are already behind the start line, so putting that on top of their study commitments really disadvantaged them I felt. And what I'm very pleased to see implemented at RMIT before I left was a new software program which I believe came very, very close to leveling the playing fields for students, particularly with print disability, in that, for the first time, such students were able to format their own study materials instantly in real time, which was an absolute game changer for me. So that was really lovely to sort of see in my lifetime in the sector. Some of the things, looking forward to the next 20 years, again for reflecting back on my experience in the education sector, another disappointment for me, in addition to print disability, was the fact that we were seeing lots of students who had gone through primary school, high school, pretty much struggling all the way, but just getting there by the skin of their teeth, that they've come to university bravely, they've knocked on the door of the relevant disability student services and sort of said, look, I've always sort of struggled at school, I've got there in the end, but I've had to put in five times the effort than my colleague or my peer students. And in tertiary sector we're able to facilitate some learning… disability learning assessments for the students to see whether or not there is a diagnosis, and if there is, try and get some great strategies that students can adopt to assist them in managing the impacts of that new diagnosis. I would really love to see in the next 20 years that primary schools and high schools realise that the disability education standards also apply to them, and they need to be much more proactive in assisting students when that assistance can make a huge difference. Identifying a learning disability in tertiary education when a student is 20ish, way too late. So that's what I would like to see in the next 20 years.

Southern Cross University, Shelley Odewahn

So, I think from my perspective, one of the most significant changes over the last ten years of my experience in the sector is our positioning of ourselves in that space. I think that for many, many practitioners in those early years there was this expectation that we position ourselves as the expert or the professional. And I think that there's a real emphasis over the last decade in privileging the lived experience of the student with disability. It's about their voice we’re the platform builders, we're not the voice, we hold the microphone for the student. And in terms of what I would like to see in the future, like many of my colleagues across the sector, I would like to see a greater emphasis on universal design for learning, particularly in relation to assessment delivery. I think it is so important that student’s diversity of learning experiences and strengths are valued in assessment, so that there is the opportunity for them to choose the pathway that allows them to demonstrate competencies in the best possible way for them.

Holmsglen, Tracy Stewart

So significant changes over the past 20 years. Certainly technology is a massive part of that. We've seen this from workbooks to handouts or workbooks and handouts to resources available online. And all of the… I was going to say COVID has kind of supercharged this. Technology has taken massive steps and now we need to sort of review and refine how that's working and make sure it's meeting everybody's needs. Student registrations have seen massive increases, which has been great. So, when I started in 2007, I think we had about 70 students registered. We're now up over 400. And that's based on a lower overall student cohort as well, so that's a significant increase of students coming into TAFE. The other thing I noticed when I first started was, we often just met with the students, so we didn't really have much contact with parents or external support services and that's seen a massive change. Lots of parental involvement and lots of external support services coming in and being available to work alongside us, so that's been great. And what we'd like to see in the next 20 years, the common one will be universal design for learning. And I think alongside that also I'd like to see some flexibility around the qualifications so that that becomes more… that there's options within the qualifications. We don't want to devalue the qualifications, but certainly I'd like to see a bit more flexibility as to how students achieve those and have a bit more variety available. Pathways obviously, that continuum of support from school into TAFE. So, a little bit more of that happening with all the learning supports and ideally learning plans and things coming from school with a plan to the students next steps and from that obviously also out into the workplace. So actual employment outcomes for students that are also much more accessible, more fluid in how students achieve that transition into the workplace. Alongside that, I'd love to see when students do get their sort of learning assessments done and see their educational psychologists, I'd like to see a little bit more follow-on support from that. So, students actually get support with how to manage the report that they're handed and help them to understand what the report means for them as an individual and how to develop strategies for their personal circumstances and have a move forward based on both their current circumstances and their future goals. And whether that's the pathway through NDIS or just other services that are available would be my ideal next 20 year pathway.

Former Practitioner, Berinda Karp

So, when I started working in the tertiary education sector over 30 years ago, disability services were emerging. I believe TAFE led the way with the appointment of specialist teacher consultants. The model worked well in providing best practice for staff and both disability specific and educational backgrounds. Their role was direct student teaching, developing and conducting staff development, curriculum design and input into the state and national legislations. The broader picture role was to work with other tertiary advisory boards, resource development and inclusion practices. 20 years ago it was a constant fight for people with disability to be included in any mainstream education. We were changing culture, practices and breaking barriers, we were questioning educational and work practices, we directly educated employers, we were challenging established social norms. I recall teachers attempting to outright refuse students in their class or those that demanded full time support teachers for a student because they're identifying as requiring reasonable adjustments, the many hours we spent educating teachers and how to make their delivery and curriculum inclusive. Unfortunately, there are still some out there that hold antiquated beliefs. I was introduced to the autistic community in its infancy in Australia in the 1960s, autism was poorly recognised or understood. I was fortunate to be in the position of head teacher disability consultant at TAFE for people with intellectual disability from the 1990s and identified there was an increasing population of people who identified as autistic or had autistic traits that were not diagnosed correctly. Judy Singer wrote of Neurodiversity, following this the movement spread. The demographics of my student cohort was changing significantly as the wave of people with intellectual disability were being accepted better and a greater number of people came to me identifying as autistic who had a different set of support needs. Due to many factors, autistic students were accessing a broader range of courses. This is in no way a statement that limits students aspirations, but an observation. Thus, another set of teachers and employers required a change in culture, attitude, education about diversity and inclusion. Autism diagnosis is experienced in exponential growth as identified by ABS and NDIS, due to greater awareness, identification and diagnosis. Autistic led research is helping as well as parents, professionals and individuals are being proud and open of their diversity. I instigated transition programs for autistic students coming from school to TAFE. These have blossomed into the Transition Handbook and other tertiary institutions, developing orientation, mentoring and ongoing support for autistic students. Inclusion and diversity is now an accepted mandate in education and KPIs in many businesses. Universal design for learning is increasing as a built-in factor in curriculum design. My goal with my work with autistic youth and adults is to make myself redundant. I have given the person the tools, the skills for independence, and they don't need me anymore. My dream is for our culture, community and society, is that we will not need inclusive practices, policies, UDL or KPIs because inclusion, diversity, acceptance of individuals will be a naturally occurring part of our lifestyle.

University of Technology Sydney, Andrew Downie

So, some significant changes over the past 20 years. There have been major technical advances. To begin with just the sheer computer power, there's been the development of tablets and that's been a major benefit for quite a lot of people. Assistive technology has improved considerably both on computers and on smartphones. And really importantly, much assistive technology has become mainstream, including screen readers, literacy assistance and speech import. Conference tools have also, particularly over the last several years, become really important, partly from an accessibility standpoint, but just from a general communications standpoint as well. Learning management systems have become more accessible, by and large. They're still not perfect, but they have improved continually. And there is also more effort by, I think, most institutions to make the content on Learning Management Systems more accessible. Expectations of students who have disabilities have become more positive. Changes I would like to see over the next 20 years, I probably won't be around in 20 years, but anyway, there will almost certainly be further improvement in both mainstream computing and assistive technology. It will be really good if more commercially produced educational material would become accessible, there is still far too much material that is produced that is not accessible. There needs to be much more emphasis on accessible procurement by educational organisations. That includes educational material, but also the systems that are used by staff and students to access the organisation. It would also be really good if far more courses were developed with UDL principles rather than relying on reasonable adjustments after the course had been developed.

Tasmania TAFE, James Newton

I guess the number of students disclosing disabilities is increasing, yet their continuation, attainment and employment rates are still lower than students who do not experience disability. Numerous factors make up this gap, and in many cases of pandemic hindered students with disability. However, I think there have been changes to certain practices or norms that have benefited. So, I guess we had the standard Disability Standards for Education in 2005, the NDIS, they've been pretty significant, but the pandemic probably has been a big one we've seen recently, and probably having them have more profound impacts. While the process of applying for NDIS and Centrelink disability supplements is lengthy, and we see that it often introduces delays in providing support to students, especially in that transition period to higher education where the dropout rate is so high. The pandemic has shown us, I think, that student support can be triaged based on ease of implementation and made available to students straight away, while the admin work is completed in the background. I think this can be relatively easy for some support, such as handouts for sessions, extended library loans. For example, a student with Dyslexia could access text to speech and speech to tech software, and the use of loanable equipment such as scanning pens to cover the period of time until they've got their own equipment. And beyond this instant support, I think many institutions are looking at how best to improve accessibility across the board and incorporating it into the basic quality standards for courses and services they now provide. We've got lecture capture widely used and course materials increasingly online. During the Pandemic, I think we also saw new assessment methods rapidly developed in a variety of formats so that came in the form such as open book tests, ongoing assignments, oral or pre-recorded presentations, and group projects. And in some cases, students were offered a choice of assessment method to evaluate their understanding, meaning they could pick the most accessible option to them. I think while having different assessment methods increases the administrative burden on the institution, the effect on accessibility as well as student satisfaction and performance makes it worthwhile. I think many institutions have installed the infrastructure to deliver online learning in parallel to in person teaching. This was out of reach for students with disability for many years because of the cost, but the same technology can now be used to record lessons providing synchronous and asynchronous learning material, further increasing the options for engagement and access. Flexibility of delivery not only helps students with disability, but those in full or part time employment, parents, commuters and carers, among others. This technology could be lost if it's not properly maintained and supported by teaching staff, so I think it's critical that despite institutions are returning to so called normal, that they keep up training and improvements. I guess by making materials and classes available online as well as in person, students can also revisit parts of lessons they haven't fully grasped, helping them progress academically. And since the virus is still out there mutating, it enables immunocompromised learners and staff, or students and staff who are carers of people who are immunocompromised to participate instead of being excluded from education and employment. Lastly, the greater compassion and understanding that was shown during the pandemic across the higher education sector, with accessibility at the heart of student support. So minor reforms to policies and practices to be more flexible and supportive I think has been the key to reducing the attainment gap for students with disability, as well as many other non-traditional student groups for whom completing a traditional course is very difficult. For example, policies around extenuating or mitigating circumstances and becoming more wellbeing centred I think is having a really positive impact. So, these could be changes as simple as providing flexible deadlines, offering additional tutoring in areas where students are struggling, or providing content in different formats. As for changes I'd like to see happen in the next 20 years, I guess the best way to ensure accessible learning is to engage with students and staff with disability and get their firsthand experience on what is and isn't working and if changes have had the desired effect. New practices should be reviewed for their impact on different types of conditions to ensure no particular group is disadvantaged. For example, while online teaching can be of great benefit for students with physical or fluctuating conditions, without adequate captioning it could present a large barrier to deaf students. There is rarely a catch all solution, which is why flexibility and choice is so important. I think the other area worth noting is it turns out that no senior leader in Australian higher education discloses having a disability on their official biography published on their employers website or on their LinkedIn or Wikipedia profile. So that includes Vice Chancellor's, Provost’s, Deputy Vice Chancellor’s in all Australian unis, CEOs and general managers at TAFEs, as well as executive leadership of sector wide bodies like Go8, ATN, the Australian Technology Network, the Innovative Research Unis, regional Uni Network. So, no disability mentioned on any profiles. I guess, what message does this send to the almost 20% of the population who live with disability? Or the up to 10% of tertiary students with disability? Or those with a disability who work in higher ed? It's hard to dream of reaching the top when there's no one with disability visible to look up to. I think even more pressing are the impacts that this lack of diverse leadership has on the institutional community as a whole. If we're not at the decision making table to speak for ourselves, our needs can often be ignored or misinterpreted, leading to a significantly worse experience in all areas. If we're not at the table, we're typically on the menu. This has obvious ramifications of excluding us from physical spaces and impacting our learning and working experiences, but it can also extend to how disability is taught in course content and how accessibility is taught in course content, how students and staff participate in extracurricular activities, or whether training materials or workshops are relevant to our needs. I think all these activities could lead to improved leadership outcomes. When people with disability don't see themselves represented or see the value of such activities, their lack of participation takes them out of the leadership pipeline. While I acknowledge there may indeed be leaders who live with disability but have decided not to disclose it, others don't get this choice. While I'm privileged to work in an institution that celebrates diversity, nevertheless, people in my sector who have disclosed disability are more likely to encounter discrimination than to be provided with opportunities to succeed. Accordingly, a senior leader who lives with disability or someone aiming for such a role may therefore be reluctant to disclose. Changing the discussion around disability requires a societal shift. Despite the steady increase in the numbers of students with disability graduating from TAFEs and unis, our employment rate is not changed in almost 30 years. Yet many students with disability go on to complete higher degree research. So even though they, and academics with disability, confront considerable barriers to success, they're here now and keen to take up leadership positions. This is where I think higher education can make a difference. The sector can create pathways to leadership and celebrate ability diversity. I think institutions need to take the time to understand accessibility and attitudinal barriers to leadership. Perhaps as a start, they can promote a culture that celebrates rather than problematises diversity and adopt a strategic approach to widening participation.

Thank you to our 20 past and present practitioners from across the tertiary sector for their reflections on the past 20 years and insights into the next 20 as we celebrate ADCET's 20th year. ADCET is committed to the self determination of First Nations people, we acknowledge the Palawa and Pakana peoples of Lutruwita upon which lands ADCET is hosted. We also acknowledge the traditional custodians of all the lands across Australia and pay our deep respect to the elders past, present and emerging. Thank you.