SUSAN BEARD:
Hi, everyone. I'm Susan Beard, the National Disability Coordination Officer from the Adelaide Metro region and hosted by (UNKNOWN). For those of you who don't know about the National Disability Coordination Officer Program, the program works strategically on national collaborative projects to assist people with disability, to access and participate in tertiary education and subsequent employment. And so, welcome to our discussions on Building Disability Confidence, advising your students to positively position their disability. I'm very happy to be joined today by Debbie Rooskov and our special guest presenter Helen Cooke. Before we start, I just have some housekeeping. If you're watching or listening to this recording, you already know it's on the ADCET website and captions are included, but there's also a podcast on the ADCET website. So, if you prefer to listen to a podcast when you're on public transport, walking a dog, however you like to listen, we hope you will enjoy it. So, I would also like to acknowledge the land we meet on today, or that I meet on is the land of the Kaurna people, and they are the Traditional Custodians of the Kaurna land on which I meet, and that's the land of the Adelaide Plains.

And I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge the importance of their cultural heritage and spiritual beliefs to the Kaurna people and to all people in our nation as we heal, learn and grow together. I'm going to share just a little bit of background information about how this discussion has come about. Helen, Debbie, and our colleague David Swain in Queensland and I have had numerous conversations around the gaps and barriers that students with disability face in terms of gaining employment. And I should qualify that and say, tertiary students gaining their employment once they've finished their qualification. And we know there's a fair bit of information around, about the gaps and barriers that they face in gaining employment, but there's not a lot of information out there in terms of the practical strategies and examples for building students' capability as they navigate the recruitment processes. And how they can be best advised to positively position themselves with their disability and be confident in their skills that are relevant to the job description and also including those that they've honed through their lived experience of disability.

So, before I hand over to the wonderful Debbie and Helen, I'd like to thank everyone for your questions you've submitted for the session. Helen will cover them through our discussion, and we'll attempt to answer those at the end as well, a big if there's time permitting. A big thank you to ADCET also, for hosting this recording and offering it in podcasts for our audience. So, Deb, over to you.

DEBBIE ROOSCOV:
Thanks, Susan. And hello to everybody, and thank you for joining us with this discussion. And I am the lucky one that I have great joy to introduce Helen Cooke. And I also welcome her back virtually, to our shores (UNKNOWN). So, welcome back to Australia. If you've joined us for one of the sessions that Helen has done before, you know that this hour is going to go extremely fast. I've been fortunate to see the presentation, it's amazing. Helen is going to share so much wealth of knowledge, and she has the great skill of doing it in such a logical manner. And she's going to instill her passion into our work, which is just brilliant. And not only will you listen to Helen, there's going to be many takeaways that you will be able to grab from this session, and also implement that into your daily roles. Helen is the director and founder of MyPlus, which is one of the UK's leading authorities in disability recruitment and development. It was established back in 2006, where Helen and her team work with employers to help them recognise the unique talents and strengths that individuals with disability can and do bring to an organisation.

The team also work with graduates to build skills, confidence and provide a bit of an insight to help them be empowered and be really strong advocates to secure meaningful employment. Very excitedly, MyPlus recently joined the valuable 500 Global Directory of Disability Inclusion Specialists. So, we know that Helen is amazing, and it's also now recognised that she is one of the most influential people with disability. So, we're very excited to bring Helen to you during this webinar and also podcasts. So, Helen, I'm going to say welcome and I'm going to hand over to you.

HELEN COOKE:
Thanks, Debbie. And thank you for such a warm introduction, I hope I could live up to it. So, hello, everybody, and I'm absolutely delighted to be joining you today for this discussion. As Debbie said, my name is Helen Cooke. I'm the CEO and founder of MyPlus. And our mission is to ensure that having a disability doesn't prevent anyone from having the career that they want to have. And for the last 17 years, we've worked with employers, we've worked with universities, and we've worked with individuals to make that a reality. And it's something that I'm incredibly passionate about. I'm a wheelchair user, I had a spinal tumor as a baby, and I have been fortunate enough to have an enjoyable career since I graduated many years ago. Initially with Marks and Spencer, a large retailer in the UK, and then with Mars and the wonderful world of chocolate, where I moved into HR, and resourcing and student recruitment. So, in terms of today, this is really about looking, as Debbie said and Susan said, at the challenges and barriers that disabled students with disabilities can and do face as they transition from education to employment, and how we can help them to overcome those barriers with some really practical advice and guidance.

So, we're just going to start by looking at the employment landscape, understanding those challenges. I think it's really important that we do that, because, unless we understand where they're coming from, its very difficult for us to provide the advice and guidance that they require. And then I'm going to move on to that specialist careers advice and guidance, and four key things that I think really make a difference. One is positively positioning their disability. Secondly, how do they share information about a disability, we often call this disclosure. Requesting support and adjustments during the recruitment process. And the fourth one is accounting for mitigating circumstances or differences on their CV or application as a result of their disability. Then I'm going to touch on some resources we have available for you before moving on to our Q&A with Susan and Debbie. So, let's just start with the Employment Landscape. As I said, I think it's really important that we understand what's going on for this group of individuals if we're going to support them and advice them.

Now, let's start with an increasing number of students at university and into higher education have a disability. In the UK, it's 15% students. I think we have a higher declaration rate than many other countries, not least that the students are able to apply for a disabled students allowance, and it goes to them directly. But that number when I first started doing this 17 years ago was at 7%. And a lot of companies would say, "Well, we're not looking at this, it's not big enough." Now, it's one in six, it's 15% of the students, of the talent pool. And it's too important for us not to ensure that these individuals are able to enter the employment market. To not do so is a waste of their skills and talents. And for companies, it's a waste of the talent that they could be bringing into their organisation. We know that students with disabilities find it harder to find employment when they graduate than their non-disabled counterparts. That's not a reason for them not be looking for employment.

But we know that there are barriers and challenges, which I'm going to come on to, that makes it harder. It could be more difficult to gain work experience than their non-disabled counterparts. So we're not even talking about, necessarily, the relevant work experience, we're talking about any work experience. As I grew up, my sisters were able to work in the local shop, they were able to serve in the local pub. I think my younger sister had a paper route. They were able to babysit. And as somebody in a wheelchair, I wasn't able to do any of those things. All of those things were closed to me, so I didn't have any work experience, let alone relevant work experience, what I wanted to do. An area that I'm going to cover and quite (UNKNOWN) is this area of disclosure. Not a word that I'm a fan of, makes it sound like we've got this terrible secret. But we did some research, and we found that 76% of students don't want to disclose their disability to the employer. And that's an awful lot of fear, and it's an awful lot of barrier to success.

Students with disabilities believe that their disability will be seen as a weakness by an employer. That's not my word, that's their word, 'weakness'. It always upsets me when I hear them say that. And I think, even more powerfully, some students see their own disability as a weakness. So, there's lots going on with this talent pool. So, now let's have a look at the barriers and challenges and how some of these translates into these barriers as they start transitioning from education into employment. Well, one of the biggest barriers is that they lack confidence. And they are lacking the confidence to apply for companies, enter the recruitment process and, as a result, be successful. I think some of that confidence comes from the fact that it's very easy to compare ourselves to others. And we know that students do this, and they see themselves as, perhaps, not able to do things or not able to do things easily. And as a result, here comes that second point, that they see themselves as this weak candidate.

And therefore, (UNKNOWN) thinking, "Why else would I apply? I'm not as good as other people, and I'm going to be sifted out in the recruitment process." As I said, one of the huge barriers is, should I be open about my disability? And this fear, that 76% of people are being fearful about telling an employer about their disability is resulting in two things. For some individuals, they're not even applying for jobs in the first place. I don't want to share this information, I'm not ready to do so, I'm not even applying for jobs. The second cohort of people are applying for jobs, but because they won't be open about their disability, they're going to hit a potential barrier in the recruitment process. They won't ask for the extra time, the interpreter, the font in a larger size, the orientation visit. and therefore, they're hitting barriers and they're going to be rejected for roles that they're more than capable of doing. Not surprisingly, they see themselves as a weak candidate, they fear discrimination.

I tell you about my disability, you don't want me. They also have to sometimes account differences on their CV. It might be gaps in their education. It might be lower grades. It might be that lack of work experience. I'm not sure how I account for those gaps. So, again, it's a barrier to my application. Not surprisingly, with their concerns about the judgments, the assumptions and the perception that will be made, let's face it, and I think that, traditionally, when we talk about disability, we do think about the things that people can't do, can no longer do, and find difficult to do. And we're concerned about the assumptions that's going to be made, not just about our ability, but also about our requirements and our capability. And finally requesting adjustments and support. As I've said, in order to be able to navigate that recruitment process, potentially, we're going to have to ask for adjustments and support to ensure that there are no barriers in the recruitment process. And bearing in mind we already see ourselves as the weak candidate and we fear discrimination, because I have to ask for something that seemingly no one else is asking for can huge barrier and, therefore, we prefer not to do that.

So, these are just some of the barriers and challenges that exist. And I'm going to move on to talk about the four key areas of expert advice in terms of overcoming these. But let's just look at some others, so the more general things that students need to be doing. Now, the first one is that they really need to be getting fully involved in university life. Now, that's not your sole responsibility to ensure that they do that. I'm a great believer that it is the responsibility of all stakeholders at universities to ensure that disabled students are able to participate in university life on an equal basis with everybody else. And that's going to mean getting involved in clubs and societies. And not just getting involved, they also need to take on positions of responsibility if they're going to develop their employability skills. And they're also going to need to do that volunteer work as well. What I hear far too often from students with disabilities is that they're not able to get involved.

There are things that they're able to do or, indeed, that their disability takes up too much of their time managing their disability, and they don't have time to get involved in these types of activities. But we all know that employers are looking for a lot more than just a good CV. They want to employ graduates that have developed their employability skills. And in order to do that, they're going to have to get involved in clubs and societies. They're going to have had to take on positions of responsibility and develop their leadership skills, show their initiative, show they can work with team members. And that is going to be so important in terms of putting their application together. Because if they haven't done any of that, they're going to have very little to sell to an employer. I think some of the other things that are absolutely key, and we're going to move on to these, is preparing this openness statement. For most of our students with disabilities, their disability is not going to go away, and they need to find a way to enable them to share information about their disability.

And providing an openness statement makes it so much easier to do this. This is a short, succinct statement that very simply says, "This is my situation. This is what I'm going to need during the recruitment process and this is why I need it." They need to become an expert on what they're going to need during the recruitment process. And I am just talking about the recruitment process at this point. Let's get through the recruitment process before we talk about the workplace. So, they need to understand and be able to help an employer to understand the type of support and adjustments that they're going to require. They need to be confident to position their disability positively. I'm going to come on and talk about this. We all gain skills and strengths from our experiences, and that includes managing our disability. They need to be able to draw on needs so that they're positioning their situation in a very positive way, rather than saying things like, "Unfortunately, I have dyslexia." or "Sadly, I have a visual impairment." If they're using that kind of language, then you can bet your bottom dollar that the employers are going to see it in that light as well, rather than, "This is a fantastic applicant." And finally, I know I said that it can be harder to gain work experience, internships and placements.

That is not an excuse not to try. They absolutely need to be able to do this. So, that's what I was going to say on overcoming these challenges, but I think Deb and Susan, they kind of come in just to make a few more comments here.

SUSAN BEARD:
Yes. Thanks, Helen. I just wanted to say that, in Australia, we certainly have a similar situation with the statistics for employment for graduates with disability. And yeah, a recent, a 2021 Graduate Careers Australia survey recently indicated an 11% difference in graduate employment outcomes. And still there's statistics saying that people with disability are twice as likely to be unemployed. So, again, this is where it just continues to be important to look at where we can have impact. And there's the multiple ways, obviously, that needs to occur. But certainly, building students' confidence and looking at these issues is very important with those stats existing.

DEBBIE ROOSCOV:
I agree with that, Susan. And thank you for raising those valuable points too, Helen. One of the things that we noticed with the survey we did many years ago with university students, many of them had gone through their complete degree without having any work experience in their chosen field, which we thought was pretty amazing. I know talking to some of the people who are working in our TAFE program, which is very similar to our university specialist employment partnership, that they're in there and they're really working closely with students to help them find meaningful placements. And not only does it look good on the resume, but it does build your confidence and builds your skills. And it's always easy to go and talk to an employer when you've got some - you've been there and you've experienced things. So, that's really important. And the last thing I wanna say is, coming from a graduate employer conference, that employers, they're really looking at the entire person, just not their qualifications.

Are you going to fit in with the team? What activities did you participate in? Because they want to know that you're going to be able to work with a team, engage, and you've got that great thought in working with others. So, thank you for raising all of those. I think they're really good.

HELEN COOKE:
Thank you. Just to...

DEBBIE ROOSCOV:
(INAUDIBLE)

HELEN COOKE:
Just to build on what you said there about that relevant work experience. Ideally, we do want individuals to get relevant work experience. However, here in the UK, more to do, probably, with widening participation and ensuring that those disadvantaged backgrounds aren't unfairly treated in the recruitment process. Employers have realised that it's not just relevant work experience in that chosen field you want to go into, but any work experience with its transferable skills. So, yes, ideally, if you want to be a lawyer, let's get that work experience in a law firm, but if not, anything that's going to develop the skills and strength employers are looking for that you can draw up with transferable skills are, I think is equally beneficial. So, what I want to do now, is I want to move on to talk about MyPlus. As I said, I think that when we talk about disability, I think for a long time, we have thought about it in a very negative light. We think about things that people can't do, can no longer do, find it difficult to do.

And what we're doing at MyPlus is we flip it back on its head. Instead, let's instead see past the disability and focus on the skills and the strengths that people can and do develop as a result of managing their disability. Now, here in the UK, we had some great advertising for the Paralympic Games, which would have you believe that all disabled people are superhuman. And that's not what I'm saying at all. I don't, for many years, believe that all disabled people are superhuman. But I do believe that my disability has given me something extra. It's given me a plus. And those skills and the strengths that I've had to develop to manage my disability on a day-to-day basis in a world that's not always geared up for it and hasn't always been kind. And I'm not going to give you some great big sob story because I don't have one. But there's been challenges, particularly growing up in the seventies and eighties when there was no Disability Discrimination Act, there were no laws, there was no duty to make places accessible.

I would go up to London and we would sit in the guard's van of the train. There would be no camps that you could get the wheelchair into. There were no accessible toilets. Only the other day I went up to London and I arrived at Paddington Station and both the lifts were out of order. Those are the types of challenges that I'm thinking about, going to the car park and somebody's got to come to my car even though it's an inaccessible bay and I can't get back into my car. And as a result of that, you know, if I think about it, and I wish I had thought about this when I was applying for a job all those years ago, I have developed certain skills and strengths that are relevant to an employer. This goes back to those transferable skills, things like determination and problem solving to get around the challenges. Communication skills and interpersonal skills because I have to ask people to do the things and ask for help that I can't do things myself. I think I'm incredibly resilient, and I think many disabled people would say that as well.

But let's not just look what I think MyPlus is. I want to show some others on here as well. And the first one is Sir Richard Branson, who, as you know, is the founder of Virgin Group. And he talks a lot about dyslexia and the advantage that it's given him. He says, "My dyslexia has shaped Virgin right from the very beginning and imagination has been the key to many of our successes." He says his dyslexia helped him to think big but keep messages simple. The ability to dream, conceptualise and innovate is what sets the successful and the unsuccessful apart. And dyslexia is just a different way of seeing the world. Now what I think is so key is to get our students to think about what's their plus. I've done this exercise with students, and it's such a game-changer. And I just want to share a couple of examples with some of the students that I've been fortunate enough to have met. And I ask them, as a result of your disability, what do you think are some of the skills and the strengths that you've developed that are relevant in the workplace?

And the first one is Rosie. She's a trainee solicitor at Herbert Smith Freehills, a large global law firm. And she has what she terms an upper limb deficiency so her left arm finishes at the elbow It's obviously a physical, visible disability, and it's something that she has grown up with. So what did she say in her Plus was? Well, she talked about being calm under pressure, being confident and not surprisingly, the ability to problem solve. She talks about appearing calm and positive under pressure even when she's not 'cause it's so important to her that people don't perceive it to be struggling on account of her upper limb difference. And very much connected with that is wanting to appear confident. And I think, not surprisingly, the problem solving, as she says, all through life, I've had to come up with alternative ways to complete physical tasks. And then the second person that I wanted to introduce you to is Will, and he's a business development manager with Carers UK. And he has obsessive-compulsive disorder.

So Will develop this on his placement year. He was working for a company called Enterprise, who are fantastic with the support that they offered him. Unlike Rosie, obviously, it's a hidden disability. It's a mental health condition, and he wasn't born with it, that he developed this when he was in his early twenties. And again, I asked Will, what are the strengths that you think you've developed as a result of this? Not surprisingly, resilience. "Coming to terms with my condition has led to a greater sense of perspective." He also talks about being organised. He says, "I wasn't organised beforehand, but actually I've become organized because since knowing when things need to be done by relieves and reduces his anxiety because he can prepare for it." And associated with that (UNKNOWN) prioritisation of tasks. Needing to be organised has led them to be more effective at prioritising tasks and deadlines. So as you can see, this isn't necessarily about what's variance. This is about really thinking about how I've managed my disability and what have I developed as a result of this.

And I'm going to come on to talking more about this and how we can encourage our students to positively position their disability. Susan, I know you've been coming here.

SUSAN BEARD:
Yeah, I love this information. Thank, Helen, and this is the information we really want students to have and career advisors to be working through with students. Because so often, students don't recognise these skills and the value of them to employers. And there's so many job advertisements where these skills are relevant, and they can be talking about them. And also, just very quickly, mental health, we know, is becoming more prevalent among people and increasing numbers of students presenting to careers advisors with mental health concerns. And not having confidence to apply for jobs, how they can promote their skills, will they cope in the workplace? And I'm thinking, what Will has here in terms of how he adjust, he's got strategies to manage his anxiety. And these are ways that we can be working with students to help them recognise what are their adaptive strategies to cope in the workplace, how can they be selling them to an employer. And that might depend on the employer being inclusive as well and them feeling comfortable about that.

It might be through the recruitment process or then when they're in employment. But I think this is really good information. It's not often drawn out. Students don't often recognise the value of these skills, and their adaptive strategies that are very valuable to the workplace.

HELEN COOKE:
Absolutely. And I think the mental health one is (UNKNOWN). I think the mental health one is really key. Because it can be very difficult to think, how do I position this positively? But I do have some other examples. And one of the individuals said, she talks about self-awareness, which isn't something that we necessarily develop at this stage in life. And she also talked about empathy. She said, you need to go through something like this without building your empathy and developing your empathy (UNKNOWN). So yeah, I think lots... And another lawyer said, I'm very good at solving problems rather than just identifying them. So it's really about challenging people in terms of what we're doing and handling it.

SUSAN BEARD:
Helen, just very quickly, and I don't know if you'll go into this later, but there's also the perception that, well, if someone's got a physical disability, at least with physical disability and it's visible, then you would discuss your disability in this way. But if it's hidden, no, you wouldn't draw that out in the recruitment process. In effect, we're out in terms of these examples you're giving about how students or people with disability are positively positioning themselves.

HELEN COOKE:
I think it can be used whether it's visible or not. And how you do and when you do it is up to you. It might be that you, for example, when you decide to disclose your disability for the first time to an employer because you need to request support during the recruitment process. So, for example, you need to tell them you have dyslexia because you're going to request 25% extra time. You could say at that point, you know, "I have dyslexia. I'm going to require time during the recruitment process." My dyslexia has helped me to develop my problem-solving and my creativity. You know, provide that they need to think about what's relevant to the job (INAUDIBLE). I think it's as relevant, whether it's visible or non visible. Absolutely.

SUSAN BEARD:
Thanks, Helen.

HELEN COOKE:
So now we're going to move on to providing as expert advice for your students with disabilities. Now, I always say that students, individuals with disabilities look for jobs in the same way as their non-disabled counterpart. So we want to know about the organisation. We want to know about the culture. We want to know about the opportunities, perhaps the opportunity to work abroad and to go on secondment. We want to know about the training and the benefits. But on top of that, as a result of our visibility, potentially, we have another whole swathe of questions that are related to our disability that we're going to need expert advice on. And that's what this is about. And the fourth things are that I think are actually game changers for students with disabilities is being able to positively position their disability, to be able to disclose that disability, know how to do that competently. To request the support and adjustments they require. And account for those differences on their application form.

And I'm going to take each of these now in turn. So I'm going to start with the MyPlus. I'm just going to do this quite quickly, actually, because we've already talked about this. But as I've said, I think that my disability gives me something extra. It gives me a plus. And this is what we want our students to be thinking about. What are the skills? What are the strengths? What are the abilities that are relevant to the workplace that I have developed as a result of managing my disability? We talked quite a lot about work experience, and I had another great example a number of years ago when an individual said, "I haven't been able to get any work experience." He wants to be a lawyer, but he had muscular dystrophy and he used a power wheelchair. He had very limited mobility. But he said, "I've been employing personal assistantss ince I was 16." How many other 16-year-olds can say that they've employed people and managed that for the last five years? Think about the things that he's developed as a result of that.

And that's what we're thinking about. Really, what are those transferable skills that you've developed that are relevant to the workplace? So the way that I do this is the same that you do with any student when you're getting them to identify your skills and strengths is to identify three or four that they've developed as a result of having a disability that you read at the workplace. And then for each strength to develop at least two examples of the story. You can't just say, well, I'm resilient or give me an example, or I'm not sure really. They need to have that story. They need to have those examples. And I always say, obviously, they need to be accurate. Identify the strengths that they have rather than the strengths that they actually want. Now, obviously, how they decide to use this is up to them. It could be that they use it as a way of positioning their disability when they're informing an employer about that. It might be that they decide to use it in an interview. They might demonstrate certain skills and strengths.

And all of that's great. But one thing I would say is that if you're going to use it in an interview to demonstrate the skills and strength that an employer is looking for is that's what you find (UNKNOWN) a disability. But you wouldn't do it for every question that you're asked. So in the same way that if you're captain of the hockey team, you wouldn't just use that for every single example to all the question that you asked by the employer. You wouldn't use disability-related ones either. It's fine to use that, I think, a couple of times, but you need to mix it up with some other non-disabled related strengths as well. That was what I was going to say in the MyPlus because I think we talked about that quite a lot. So what I wanted to do now was to move on to talk about sharing information about your disability. Normally called disclosure. Disclosure and declaration, not words that I'm particularly a fan of. I think it makes it sound like we've got this terrible, horrible secret that we're keeping.

That we tend to talk about openness. We talk about sharing information, informing an employer much more sort of everyday language. Now, I always say it's not for me to tell anybody whether or not that they should be open. That's up to the individual to decide. However, what I would say is that before they decide whether they are or not, and often could be, I'm not going to be. Because they've heard bad things and bad news always travels more quickly than others. What I would say is just understand what the benefits are of being open. Understand what the consequences are or not. And at least make an informed decision. So the benefits, obviously, of being open is, first and foremost, you can request the support that you need. That's the most important thing. As I said, there is no point applying for these jobs if you're going to hit a barrier in the recruitment process and you're going to be rejected for a role that you're more than capable of doing. Your relationship with a potential employer is obviously honest from the beginning.

That's what we want. You can demonstrate your full potential. As I said, you can draw on your disability to demonstrate skills and competencies. And stand out for all the right reasons. I think if we thought about this, that we can also choose when to be... We can choose what to say and when to say it and how to say it. We've all been in that situation where we say, "Crikey, I didn't mean to say it like that. I wish I hadn't said it at that point." But actually, if we thought about this, we're in control. I think also we can be ourselves. We talk about bringing our whole self to work. It takes a lot of effort to hide something. When you go to that interview, you want to be taking your whole self. You want to be focusing 100% on the interview, not only to hide a part of myself. And you can bet your bottom dollar that all of those non-disabled students aren't having to hide a part of themselves. They just focused on the interview that your students with disabilities are trying to hide a part themselves.

They're actually disadvantaging themselves because they're not focused 100% on the interview in front of them. And I think, finally, they can also understand the employer's approach to disability. If the employer isn't going to support them during the recruitment process, are they going to support them once they've actually joined the workplace? Now, I say this with a caveat because you may not get the response that you want straight away. The employer might not say, "Oh, right, yes, we've employed someone with ADHD before. That's not a problem. We know how to support you." This might be totally new to them. That's not to say... and they might not know how to support you, your student. So that's not to say they're not going to be an excellent employer, but they might need to go and find out that information. So just because your student doesn't get the immediate response that they want, that positive response, please don't think, "I'm being discriminated against, they don't want me." That's probably not going to be the case.

All those years ago, when I applied to Mars, I had a screening interview, which is on the phone. And during that, I didn't mention my wheelchair. And no other reason that I was just focused on getting through the interview. I was offered a first-round interview. It was going to be face-to-face. And somebody said to me, "You have told them, Helen, haven't you, that you're in a wheelchair?" And I hadn't. So I phoned back up. I had applied for a field sales role because I was in commercial management in Marks and Spencer. That was relevant to what I was going to be applying for. And I said to them, I'm in a wheelchair. And the response I got was, "Oh, right." I don't think Mars has got anybody in their sales force in a wheelchair. How is this going to work? Not really the response I wanted. And ultimately, I said, "OK, I understand that. However, you have offered me an interview and I would like that." And then we talked for a bit. And he needs more information. He needs more information.

And ultimately, I said, "What did I tell you about myself?" I said, "You know, I live independently. I can drive. I travel, I ski." I wanted him to know that doing a job in the field of sales wasn't going to be an issue. Now, ultimately, I went over and I had ten great years with (UNKNOWN). That's where I really found myself, what I wanted to do in terms of working in HR and working in recruitment. But it wasn't the best start. Like, I could have given up at that point. Instead, "Oh, they've discriminated against me." They didn't. They just didn't know what they were dealing with. But always say, just give employee the chance. So what information should you share? This is the million-dollar question. Students often say to me, "I don't know what to share and I have multiple disabilities. How much do I say?" Well, key to this is only state what's relevant. At this point, we're only talking about the support and adjustments during the recruitment process. That's what we're trying to get through.

Now, it might be different in Australia, but in the UK, it actually is illegal to start for an employer to ask, "What would you need if you're successful?" That's not what we're focused on here. There's a limit to the questions an employer can ask prior to an offer of employment being made. But whether or not that's the law or not, let's just state what's relevant for the recruitment process. They don't need to share their medical history. In fact, I would avoid medical terms. If you've got students that like to use their medical terminology and as soon as they say it, people say, "Oh, I've never heard of that, or what's that?" Don't use it. The nicest possible way, student recruiters are not medical experts. And they don't actually care about their disability. All they care about is getting the best talent. So what the individual needs to focus on is what support do I need to enable me to be successful? What support do I need to demonstrate my potential during the recruitment process?

And they also need to be prepared to say why it's required. So it's not going to be sufficient just to say, I want extra time. They need to say why. It's because I have a slow processing speed. I need more time to digest the information. I don't have full hand function. I need more time to be able to write my notes. So they need to be able to prepare to say why they need it. So let's just look at a few examples of what this looks like in reality. So for me, I'm a wheelchair user. I don't need to say why. I'm unable to walk and I use a wheelchair at all times. So what are my requirements if it's, say, a face-to-face interview? Well, I need access, a toilet and a parking space. Anxiety disorder. You could have, say, an anxiety disorder and you could just have a health condition. You could have a mental health condition. It's up to the students to decide what they want to share. What does it mean? Well, I get very nervous and anxious, particularly in new situations, and it would be useful for me to have an orientation visit prior to my interview, a schedule of the day's events, and for people to be aware that I may become more anxious than others.

Now, the interviewers shouldn't be asking them anything about that - it's not relevant - but actually just having that understanding could be helpful. And then the final one, I have dyslexia and dyspraxia and I have weak short-term memory and I'm unable to write comprehensive notes while I'm listening. So, what do I need? To have handouts in advance, be able to record conversations, and I'm also going to require additional time. So as you can see, we're putting together a very short, succinct statement. Very factual, no sob story. Often students say, I don't want to tell a sob story or appear to tell a sob story. We're simply saying, This is my situation, this is what it means for the recruitment process, and this is what I'm going to need. And the way that I do this with students, and I've done this - I did this last week with a room full of 50... Obviously, I built my relationship with them, built that trust, built that trust as supposed to, I just get them to break it down, get them to write a few words each about how they would describe their disability, what the implication is, and what they need.

So, start with the words. Turn that into a succinct statement and then I say, practice it. And then I might get them to stand up in pairs and to share it with each other and give each other feedback. Because I said you need to end up with a statement that you're really happy with because once you're happy with it, you're more likely to feel comfortable sharing it. And get feedback from people that they respect, whether it's you, their careers advisor, whether it's a parent, whether it's a lecturer, share it with people that you trust and as I said, end up with a statement that they're really happy to share. So that's what I was going to say on this whole issue of disclosure. And Susan or Debbie, is there anything that you wanted to come in with at this point?

DEBBIE:
Oh, here I am. Yeah, I'll just quickly jump in, Helen, and I'm not going to talk for too long because I want you to get through all the other slides. But one of the things that I've noticed, and I guess mainly I've just been talking to a lot of large employers just recently, and they're all saying that we want people to tell us they have a disability so we can put all these things in place so they can come and be their true self. Because when, you know, they're wanting to represent what our community looks like now. They know there is great benefit in doing that. But this is some strategies because we say, go and tell everyone that you know that you need the adjustments. You know, you want this sort of support while we're going through the recruitment phase, because sometimes, you know, waiting for it, putting an application in, going for an interview is some time. So we ask people to do these things, but we haven't got this. We haven't said, these are some really good strategies that work to be able to get there.

So this is definitely doing that. Thank you, Helen. And also, you know, the education providers, whether it be TAFE and RTO or university, have some great supports that can help with this process. So I'm very grateful that everyone is listening tonight, that they can take some of this on board when they're working with these students, so this is - no wonder this was a very successful event, Helen.

HELEN COOKE:
Yeah, it is about the practical answers. That's what we hope here (AUDIO DISTORTS) talking here is, we didn't know what (AUDIO DISTORTS) do and the student needs to know, what do I actually do to make the difference here?

DEBBIE:
What works and makes them comfortable in doing that as well, so thank you.

HELEN COOKE:
Absolutely. So I'm going to move on and talk about requesting support. And actually, this is probably where I'm going to spend the most amount of time because as I said, there is no point applying for jobs, all of that time applying for jobs, if we're not going to request the support that we need. So employers will ask you. Employers offer adjustments and support during the recruitment process. And why do they do this? Well, it's about levelling the playing field. For a long time, I think companies thought and we did this at (INAUDIBLE), I did a lot of recruitment at (INAUDIBLE). But to treat people fairly, we need to treat everybody the same. And actually, what we realised is this: that to treat people fairly, sometimes we need to do things differently. And as Albert Einstein says, Everyone is a genius, but if you judge a fish on its ability to climb a tree, it will live its whole life believing that it's stupid. The same with students with dyslexia. If you don't give them the extra time, they're going to believe that and live their life believing that they haven't got what an employer asks for or needs, and that's just such, such (INAUDIBLE) rubbish.

So why do employers offer this? Well, it's about levelling the playing field. It's about ensuring that the individual is not disadvantaged. But it's not about providing an advantage either. It's about ensuring they can go through that process like everybody else and achieve this job on merit. It's about ensuring that the candidate can perform to the best of their ability, demonstrates their suitability for the role, and then once that adjustment has been made, the candidate can be assessed on an equal basis to everybody else. So when they're in that workshop, when they're in that decision-making mode, they're not saying, Oh, Fred has got dyslexia or Faustin has got ADHD. It's being dealt with in the adjustment process. We've levelled the playing field, now we make the decisions based on that performance. And you don't need me to share with you the types of adjustments that can be made. This is just the tip of the iceberg. And employers are very used to putting all of this in place. Now in the UK, we have this wonderful phrase, "reasonable adjustments," because the law said that employers have a duty to make reasonable adjustments.

And the million-dollar question is, what's reasonable? But what we're trying to do, the law in the UK, it's almost 30 years old. It's outdated, it's not helpful having this term. And a lot of companies are not asking. They're not talking about reasonable adjustments. They're talking about recruitment adjustments or workplace adjustments. So rather than asking sort of what's reasonable, what we want to ask is... What support do I need to enable me to perform to my full potential? What do I need the employer to do to ensure that I can demonstrate my suitability for the role? So what we're needing, what we're asking here is, do I need this rather than, do I want it? Would I like extra time or to have rest breaks or the desk by the window? But do I need it? What does it enable me to do? What's the barrier that it enables me to overcome? And I just wanted to share sort of some examples and ask the question, are these reasonable? So the first one is, is it reasonable to request for an interview to take place in the afternoon because of your medication affecting performance in the morning?

Absolutely. Of course, it is. This is an example of a student that had mental health challenges, was on medication for that, applied to Accenture, they didn't say why they wanted their interview in the afternoon, but they ended up engaging in conversation and they did share this information. And as a result, Accenture were able to talk about what they've done in the mental health space and to ensure that this individual was supported through the recruitment process. And the individual went on not just to be successful but has talked very openly about the support that Accenture provided, including at some of our events. Secondly, to request that the video interview is replaced by face to face interview because you have autism, which will mean you struggle with a video interview. Absolutely. That's absolutely reasonable to ask for. There's a barrier there. It's not that they just don't want to do a video interview. It's because of their autism, which means they're going to struggle with it.

So actually, how do we remove that struggle? How do we remove that challenge? And one of the ways of doing that is a face to face. And then the final one, is it OK to ask to skip the group discussion during the assessment centre because you are deaf and will struggle to participate in this? It's not OK to ask, just skip it. And I would always say, don't skip any part of the recruitment process because each session is there for a reason. And if there are four parts to that assessment centre and your student is only going to be (AUDIO DISTORTS) three of them because they skipped this one, they disadvantage themselves because the employer is only seeing them on three occasions and not four. So rather than skipping it, what the request should be is, I'm going to struggle to do this. What can we do instead? So what are the skills and strengths that you're looking for and how else can you do this? And it might be another interview, it could be a role play, it could be a written exercise, but don't miss out a part of the recruitment process.

Always do all of it and get that job on merit. I think I'm just going to continue on, if that's OK, Deb and Susan, 'cause I'm just conscious of time, and we can have some questions at the end. So how does somebody work out what it is that they require? Well, again, I've taken a three-step approach to this. I do like a three-step approach. And the first one is finding out what the recruitment process involves right from application through the test, the video interviews, the assessment centre, and they need to remember that every recruitment process is potentially different. It's important to find out what the process is for every role that you apply for. Some companies have a lot of information on their website and provide a lot of information in advance. Some don't do that at all, and therefore that's going to involve engaging in conversation with the recruiter. So for each stage of the process, they need to identify what it is that they're going to need. And it's also good to remember that just because they don't need it at this stage, it doesn't mean they can't ask for it at a later stage.

So if I was doing a face-to-face interview, sorry, a video interview, I wouldn't need anything. But if I'm going to be asking for a face-to-face, then I need to tell them I'm in a wheelchair because of my access requirements. And finally, you know, once you've thought about what support you need, discuss that with an employer because they can also help you to identify any other requirements that you have that you may not identify, and they can tell you more about the recruitment process. And then the what, the when, the how. So when we're requesting support, what do we request, when do we say it, and how do we do it? Well, a bit like the opening statement in terms of what we share, just what's relevant, what are the support adjustments you need, and why you need them. What will they enable you to do? When do you request it? Well, I'd always say ideally as early as possible in the recruitment process, and you could put it on your application form or cover letter if you want to do that.

But equally, you could wait and skip it and wait for the interview. And then at that point, when they've corresponded with you, just say, Well, thank you for inviting me for interview. Just to let you know, I have dyslexia and I am going to need some support. Please can I discuss this with you? And sometimes it's much easier just to keep it really brief at that point and then engage in conversation by phone if I can do that, rather than try and work it all out and how do I write this down? And if somebody said, I have dyslexia, I don't want to have to write it down. I find it much easier to communicate verbally. Or you could wait until the stage that you actually need that support. So for me, I could decide to go through with the whole process until I actually need to tell them, which is the face-to-face interview. And how do you do it? Well, again, there are options. As I said, you could put it in your application form. You could decide to contact them by phone or email. And however you do this, just remember to position your disability positively and to identify the strengths that they've gained.

So it's not about saying, I'm sorry to tell you or I'm afraid to tell you, I don't mean to be a hassle but can I request an orientation visit? Take all that language out of it. It's not helpful. Just be very factual and be very positive in what you're requesting. So before I move on to talk about accounting for differences, anything that you wanted to say on that (INAUDIBLE)?

SUSAN BEARD:
Yes. Thanks, Helen. I think with this information about sharing information, it's just really important to look at. Students can often be advised they need to think about the what, when, and how of sharing information, but it's also so important that they come back with what they have worked out, what they're going to be saying to employers because then the career advisor can reflect back, Well, no. As you said, Helen, an employer doesn't want to know all the specific medical information, for example, about a disability. And no, don't talk about what government funding is available for accessibility requirements in your recruitment process. Leave that to after, you know, when you've been offered the job. Just focusing on, yeah, what is it that you require to be successful in that job?

HELEN COOKE:
Yeah, absolutely. Absolutely. One thing I also wanted to talk about, sorry, before I move on to the last part which is accounting for differences, I just wanted to talk about attitude. And the majority of students that I meet are actually lovely. Two insight events we've done recently had such a great bunch of students. But every so often, I meet some students that can be quite, quite demanding and quite negative. They'll be the ones that tell you their discrimination stories. I'm a great believer that most of the time discrimination doesn't happen. I know we're different in the UK to Australia, maybe we're a bit more progressed, but I think it's so easy to blame our protected characteristics. I didn't get the job because I'm disabled. No, you didn't get the job because you weren't the strongest candidate. There was someone better than you. You didn't perform well in the interview. Let's not use that as the default excuse. But I think, you know, as I said before, let's be positive. Let's avoid negative language and legal jargon.

I had someone at one of our events recently who used words - he was asking a question and he used these words: "Employees have a duty to make reasonable adjustments for me. I'm entitled to ask them for this. You don't tell employers what their duties are. They don't talk about being entitled. It's just, wow, it's going to rub somebody up the wrong way. Let's avoid that language. Request what you require, don't demand it. So again, it's not saying, You have a duty to do this for me. Engage in conversation. I think that individuals need to help employers to understand their requirements. As I've said, student recruiters are not experts in disability. And the individual needs to become an expert in what they need and they need to help the employer to understand what they're going to require and why. And they should remember that this may be the start of a long-term relationship with a future employer, and they want to get off on a good start for that. Now, the last area I wanted to talk about was accounting for differences on an application or a CV.

I said at the beginning that as a result of having a disability, we may have differences that we can account for. We find this quite difficult, and again, these are reasons that we don't apply for jobs or that we don't talk about our disability. So it's, you know, mitigating or extenuating circumstances or serious problems or events which are outside of our control which may have affected your exam results, attendance at school, or the ability to obtain work experience. And it could be physical or mental illness, it could be personal problems, and it could be family bereavement. And employers will take genuine mitigating circumstances relating to your disability into consideration. Of course, they will. They're only human. So one of the things that tend to be the difference with a disability - that tends to be, not always - but lower grades, the gap in education, or that lack of work experience. We need to find a way, a bit like (INAUDIBLE), a bit like requesting support, of making it easier for ourselves to explain these.

And again, I would make it very simple. This is my disability or my condition. Either these are the skills or strengths I've developed as a result of it, which is your positive way of doing this, or, This is what I'm asking you to take into consideration and this is what I need to explain. So again, let's have some examples of this. And these are all real-world examples (INAUDIBLE) provides me with. So this is somebody who says, For several years I have experienced anxiety and panic attacks when under severe stress. I experienced anxiety attacks during the exams, resulting in a lower mark for these modules. Since I didn't fail, I was eligible to resit these exams, and I trust that you will take this into consideration when reviewing my application. So again, a very factual statement. This is the situation, this is what happened, this is what I'm asking you to take into consideration. No big sob story, no big drama. This is Michael. During my second term at university, he lost 50% of his vision in three weeks.

Obviously, it was a very stressful time, and he decided to take some time out whilst his condition continued to change, and he adapted to his new situation before returning to his studies. During the two years that I took out, I also worked part-time at a small law firm. My confidence returned during this time, and he also talked about developing resilience and adaptability in dealing with this difficult situation. So again, he's accounted for that time he took out, but he also brought in some positives. He adapted to his new situation, he took on some part-time work, he developed his confidence, and he talked about his resilience. Why wouldn't you want Michael in your team? He's probably a stronger candidate than many of those that walk through the doors of those employers. And the last one is his lack of work experience that we've talked about quite a lot. There's somebody here that says, While my disability has until now... Good one until now, cause they're not applying for a job. Made it challenging me to obtain work experience.

I feel that in managing my disability I've demonstrated and developed certain competencies. Managing my disabilities specifically forced me to develop my communication and influencing skills as a result of having to work with service providers. I've also developed my ability to plan and organize as a result of coordinating my doctor's appointments around my university schedule. So again, it is a very positive way of accounting for this lack of work experience and pulling out some key skills and talking about why they developed them or why they're talking about them. So the last thing that I was going to talk about was resources. Susan and Debb, do you want me to do this now or do you want to come in before I do so?

SUSAN BEARD :
No, I think go for it now Helen.

HELEN COOKE:
OK. So I just wanted to very briefly talk to you about some resources. Now, the student's club website is our careers and advice website for students with disabilities, and it is very UK based. However, we have almost 50 employers profiled on this site and although the jobs that they are advertising are UK based, the advice and guidance that they're providing on their profile and how they talk about themselves as an employer is global. So any of these companies that are also based in Australia and these companies have got case studies of people talking about how they manage their disability in the workplace. They've got hints and tips of how to manage the application process. They talk about the importance of disability and I think it's just some great resources for your students to have a look at. And some of them, for example, Yorkshire, have also got obviously offices in Australia. And in fact, only yesterday I ran a webinar for them and I'm now in communication. I read an email earlier today saying we're part of the Australian Network on Disability.

So a lot of these companies are working in the disability space and it's really worth just having a look at what they're talking about. We've got a whole load of careers guides that you can download on these four key areas, which students can download, they're all for free. And please do go and have a look at them. And then specifically for you, for the careers advisors, we developed a toolkit to be disability competent on campus. We've got a whole lot of information all about disability and barriers, useful for you and your colleagues. We've got a training webinar for you to use and again for you to share with your colleagues. And we've got some discussion leaflets as well because what we were told when we were developing this by Careers Advisors was that students tend to come to you with certain questions. And this is just about actually how do we guide them through challenges that they're facing. And we also have four digital training packs. The areas that I've covered, those four key areas, we've developed training packs and training trainer guides so that you can take your students through these.

The toolkit is just one, of course once you've got that you can use it as many times as you want with your students. And I can or Debb or Susan can provide you with better information about that. So that was all that I was gonna cover. However, I know that Debb and Susan have got lots of questions and we've got time for those. So I'm going to stop sharing my slides and suggest that we go to those questions now.

SUSAN BEARD :
Helen, just very quickly, I want to say it was me that asked you to please discuss your toolkit again. And just very quickly, I'd really encourage organizations to make this investment. I've seen the toolkit and it is brilliant. And the strategies you work through step by step, and students knowing that this information comes from good practice that you've developed. So I just wanted to say that Helen. So thanks again and we'll get on to the questions. Debbie, did you want to ask the first one?

DEB :
Sure. I'm going to combine a few, Helen, because we had some great (CROSSTALK).

HELEN COOKE:
We can do in 15 minutes, don't rush too much.

SUSAN BEARD :
Good.

DEB :
So I don't have to speak really fast Helen to get them out. This I think is from one of our desk providers and maybe one that is working in our university specialist or type specialist employment program. It's how best to work with employers to improve their outcomes for students with disability. Is there a tip that you found that works well to engage the employee to start off with, to start that conversation?

HELEN COOKE:
That's an interesting one sort of to start that conversation. I think there's a number of things. The things that I find can engage is using some of that stats. Did you know that 11 percent of students in universities in Australia, I think it's 11 percent you said, identify as having a disability. And that's a huge part of your (UNKNOWN). I think the plus, talking about the plus new skills the students have developed, certain skills that are relevant to your workplace. I know it's very easy for you the employer to focus on and probably think about the things that you think that they're going to find difficult, but that often isn't the case. These students are resilient. They are determined. They have the problem solving skills. They have the people skills. And I think maybe to try and understand from the employee, what are your concerns? What are your barriers? And then how can we help you with those? Because it might be we don't know how to support. Well, actually, we're used to supporting them, let's be part of that conversation.

As a whole I always say I think the employers should talk directly to the individual. I'm a great believer in that. But actually, if the employer really doesn't know what they're doing then hopefully the advice can provide them with that support or dare I say it, point them in my direction. I'd love to provide them with some training. We talked about this is disability. These are the stats and facts. This is the plus. These are the challenges that people find. This is how we support them. This is how we make an inclusive recruitment process. There's so many resources, what we want them to do is to realize the kind of pool they're missing out on and then help them to understand that there are resources, they don't need to do this on their own, that there are resources out there.

DEB :
Agree with you entirely. We've got a few ones. This is one that we'll particularly like as well. They're all just brilliant. It's almost from, I think someone who is looking for employment and has had a few jobs, but it's how to mentally and emotionally prepare for having to job hop more frequently than a non-disabled person in order to find an employer who's willing to make reasonable accommodations for disability. They're saying that they've had to move on from a job because the employer doesn't want to be inconvenienced. And just the emotional, the motivation and the emotional turmoil it is for the difficulty in having to jump from an employer to employer because the employer said they will look to accommodate. But then once they're in the role, they're saying, why can't you be like everybody else? And then having to leave that to go and find another employer. So have you come across people who've had that rollercoaster of looking for work and the energy that is required to continually to be out there promoting yourself, knowing that you're able to do the job quite well.

HELEN COOKE:
I have to admit that I haven't heard this question before. And in a way it surprises me because what we know is that as a whole, once people with disabilities find employment, if it works for them they tend to stay. And I remember when I was looking around after (UNKNOWN) and Spencer, and I got the job with (UNKNOWN), I remember sitting my mum down and say, Mum, I've got some news for you and I want you to be happy for me. Because she sort of said, (UNKNOWN) and Spencer have been so good to you Helen, why would you want to move on? And I guess the thing for me is I don't know why, you shouldn't have to job hop. And I think that this is about really trying to do the research and finding the company that works for you. There's a number of things here, you need to be realistic with yourself, first of all in the jobs that you are applying for. If, for example, you can only do a three day a week, don't apply for five day a week job. If you are not good at working under pressure, don't apply for a job that is going to be pressurized.

The first rule that's been is having a reality check. And that's not just about disability, that's anyone. That's somebody who's got caring responsibilities, child responsibilities, an extreme hobby that they do. You need to really question about what do I want from my job or what can I give to my job? I think that once you've been made that job offer, then you need to have an honest conversation with the employer about this is the support that I'm going to need. But if you don't tell them that up front and you get into that job and then it's like, Oh, by the way I've got physio three times a week, well you kind of are an inconvenience because you didn't tell them that. So I think there's got to be, without knowing the situation of why this person's job hunting it's quite difficult to answer this, but I think we all have to think about the jobs that we can do. What our limitations are, we all have limitations. Do our research around the company and once we've got that job offer, this is not be discussed in the interview cause it's not relevant.

But once that job offer is there be very honest about what support you're going to need and whether they're going to provide it or not. And if they're not, then I'd move on.

SUSAN BEARD :
I think that's relevant information, Helen. And the research and also the looking at the job advertisements, the inclusion statements. There can be many generic statements about we're an inclusive workplace. But actually, what does that mean? And as you say, doing the research further on that.

HELEN COOKE:
I had a student at this event last week on the panel, he worked for one of the law firms and I think he had autism and ADHD. And he said that he researched the firms. He researched them on LinkedIn, he found people, he contacted them and he narrowed it down to 20 companies that he knew were inclusive. He did his research.

DEB :
Building on from what you were saying there about the statements and that a lot of I was talking to a lot of larger employers not the smaller businesses, but they are really looking to find, you know, a whole range of people to form part of their team. And you're talking about the research side of it. And I'll say that's the thing that is lacking the most in relation to people looking for roles. And a lot of them now have, because they're wanting to increase the number of people with disability working for them, they have videos on their website to say, hey, I work in this organization, these are some good things and this is what you're going to find when you come and work for us. So the research, I think is a really big valuable point.

HELEN COOKE:
I think the tide is turning. And I know that we've talked about the fact that maybe Australia is behind the UK, but the tide is turning. I think that for a long time disability wasn't talked about. People didn't go into inclusive schools, didn't go to universities. And that's not the case anymore. And employers are recognizing there's talent pool and you have to think that we are talking to the people that are heading up these businesses and recruiting, have children. They have got children. They have family members that have disabilities. And they know the talent pool that exists. In the UK at the moment, there's a huge focus on neuro-diversity, huge focus of recognizing the skills that neurodivergent people have and can bring to the workplace.

SUSAN BEARD :
Helen also we do get questions about students wanting to know how they might open discussions with employers, but where they don't actually meet the inherent requirements. So they're wondering can they have that discussion with an employer around flexibilities? What would you say to that?

HELEN COOKE:
When a student doesn't meet the requirement?

SUSAN BEARD :
Well, sorry, when someone wants to apply for a job and they're thinking they know they don't meet the inherent requirements and they want to know if they could discuss that with an employer around flexibilities around that. Would you suggest they do that or not?

HELEN COOKE:
If we're talking about competency, no, I don't. You're saying I don't actually have the skills and strengths for the job that's what you're talking about?

SUSAN BEARD :
I think so. It was a bit of an unclear question.

HELEN COOKE:
I would say no. You know, on one hand, I get all my high (UNKNOWN) with this. We want equality and we want equity, and then we're saying, oh, give us a side door. Recruiting disabled individuals is not about charity. And actually, you know, if you want to go and work for Google or Herbert Smith (UNKNOWN) or BP, you need to be of their caliber. Don't ask them for a pass. Personally, is where I'm with that. Because there's an awful lot of people that don't have disabilities that can't work for those companies because they're not good enough. Go find that is suitable for you. And I also think that why would you want to do that? Because you're going to struggle. And potentially you're going to perpetuate this myth, oh well, we gave (UNKNOWN) a chance, she's got disabilities, she wasn't very good. Or are you not going to be very good? She didn't have the criteria for the job. So for me it's an absolute no. Disability is not about lowering standards.

SUSAN BEARD :
And if it's an experience issue to get there, as you said, build those employability skills, yeah. OK, Debbie, did you want to ask the one about government funding? Would you want me to?

DEB :
I don't mind doing it. I guess this was just learning a little bit from what you've seen working in the UK. And also have your little connections with your global 500 organized group. Have you seen any really good practices that government has done for strategies, whether it be TV, radio, social media, around the employment of people with disability? We've, as you know, it's changed a little bit here too, we're talking more about disability and employment. We have Australian of the year who has a disability is making some really good waves as well. So it's something that we're talking about a lot often, but we've never seen a really good strategy that really says, hey have you considered. Is there anything that you have done at all or have you seen around that works well?

HELEN COOKE:
Government's not going to make it, in my opinion. These are my opinions, that's not the reason to do it, you know. You don't want an employer to engage with disabled people because the government has told them to. It's totally the wrong reason, in my opinion. You want them to recognize the talent pool and to realize that it's the right thing to do. We shouldn't be excluding anyone for any reason, including disability. So, you know, the equality laws came in 1994 here and said you know, you can't discriminate. Prior to that, I think we did have quota systems, but I just think that's not. No, I haven't seen a good government strategy here. And I don't want to go and work for a company that is including me because the government's told them that they should. I want them because they recognize that I am a damn good employee, that's why I want them to recruit me. And I think that when companies wake up and you see the light bulbs go on, you see light bulbs go on. There'll be somebody that says, you know, I worked with somebody, I had somebody in my team.

I'm watching my son manage his, you know, mental health problem or his dyslexia. I recognize the skill, I recognize the resilience. I've got three sons that have neurodivergent conditions and they're all now go to university and I want them to have a level playing field. We want them to do it because they see the talent, not because the government says that you should be doing this. In my opinion.

DEB :
(UNKNOWN) by definition Helen, well done.

SUSAN BEARD :
Yes. So I think we can finish there. And Helen, thank you, we're just so grateful that you've done this presentation. You've provided the complete package. And I just think you're a fantastic collaborator as well. If people only knew all the emails and meetings and conversations and fleshing out of these issues. Yeah. You've really been so generous with your time. Helen, we thank you so much.

HELEN COOKE:
Not at all. I love working with both of you and with David. I think it was back in 2017, 2018, we started collaborating, I think it was the pandemic. I can't remember by now, done some work and let's just continue to have these conversations. I genuinely, as I'm sure everybody watching this, that work is good for us. You know, money is a housekeeping factor, but it provides us with our purpose. It's how we build our confidence, it's how we contribute. It's our role in society. It's our social interaction. And work personally has given me so much and so many friends as well. And I don't want anybody to be excluded from that. And actually, if we can go out and make a difference to just one person, every person who watches this is one person, then we're on our way to ensuring that mission and ensuring that disability doesn't prevent anyone from having their dream career. But thank you very much.

SUSAN BEARD :
Thank you so much. And I'd also just very quickly like to thank (UNKNOWN) again for hosting this recording and the podcast. Thank you to all of you who are listening and watching, for distributing this recording amongst your networks and for your questions. And yeah, we look forward to further conversations. Thanks, everyone, and thank you again, Helen. Bye bye.