- ...your host/guide for today and on behalf of the University of Wollongong, it gives me great pleasure to welcome all of you here today.

Before we jump into what is a packed schedule for the day, I would like to acknowledge that Country for Aboriginal Peoples is an interconnected set of ancient and sophisticated relationships. The University of Wollongong spreads across many interrelated Aboriginal countries that are bound by this sacred landscape, and intimate relationship with that landscape since creation, from Sydney to the Southern Highlands to the south coast, from fresh water to bitter water to salt, from city to urban to rural. The University of Wollongong acknowledges the custodianship of the Aboriginal people of this place and space that has kept alive the relationships between all living things. The university acknowledges the devastating impact of colonisation on our campus’s footprint and commit ourselves to truth telling, healing and education.

So just first, we're going to jump in, and I'm going to delete that little pop-up there, and look at some housekeeping. So emergency emergency evacuation, folks, either door - out either door. Turn left at the end of the corridor, hit the sliding doors out to your right to the car park. That's the closest way to exit the building and nice and easy. Bathrooms, out either door, turn right to the end of the corridor, right again, and they're back on your right. So effectively they're behind this wall.

Water refill station, just out the door across the hallway, nice and easy. So if you brought your bottle and you're a good little environmental warrior, ones for you, you can refill your bottle there.

Food options. We will have lunch. Lunch will be coming at 1150. So we've got that. If you haven't put in your order, if you have specific dietary requirements and you have not put that into me or to my team, please come and tap me on the shoulder and we'll get that sorted out. Coffee, you've got your drinks. Great. Lots of options as well. If anyone's missed out again, please put your hand up and grab me. And bins, bins are at the door available. Okay. So for our first session this morning, we have a fantastic learning experience for you all. I'm going to now now hand over to Dr. Kylie Austin from the University of Wollongong, who is going to introduce our keynote speaker for the day. So I'll now hand over to - I believe Bailey is going to get this kicking for us.

- Bailey has been running the Discovery Days event this whole week. He is just a guru, so he's also Bailey from IT. And he's Bailey event manager.

BAILEY: All right. Kylie, over to you.

KYLIE: Okay. Thanks, Bailey. Hi, everyone. Sorry I couldn't be there in person today. We've been there in person all week. Welcome to those joining us face to face, our career advisers in the room at the University of Wollongong. We've also got a whole host of staff from across the higher education sector, the TAFE sector, who are joining us online today as well. So thank you everyone for joining us. We are very fortunate to have you all here and thank you for your interest in this project.

To give you a bit of an overview of the project initially and how Jane fits into the broader context, the project has been funded by the National Careers Institute. Sarah O'Shea, who's also joining us online today as well with the research Project Lead and the project was funded back in 2020.

The project invited a number of universities from across Australia to be involved. So whilst the central team who has led the project under Sarah O’Shea in Curtin - yeah, whilst Sarah led the national project and she was here on Monday sharing the outcomes of that initial broader project, each university - so Curtin University, Wollongong, Tasmania and Deakin each led pilots of the projects at their respective institutions. And we've heard from each of those institutions this week. So UoW presented on a student panel on Tuesday, we have Molly Dollinger presenting on different career identities on Wednesday, and we had Sue Kilpatrick from the University of Tasmania present on employers on Thursday. And for those of you who may have missed the other components of the symposium across the week, we will be sharing all of those online with you via email and they'll be available on the ADCET website.

Just to let you know that we'll be recording the session today. And if you require closed captions, they're available on the toolbar below. But we have Jane Coffey joining us from Curtin University today who led one of the pilot projects at Curtin University, and she is joining us online from Western Australia. Unfortunately, she couldn't be with us in person, so a little bit of a different experience for those in the room and those online today. But we're very, very fortunate to have Jane online, who'll be talking about her experiences and her project with Neurodiverse students. So thank you so much, Jane, and handing over to you.

JANE: Hi everyone. Look, it's lovely to be here, although it's virtually. I tried to clone myself to work out how I could get to be there with you physically in Wollongong but I've been, up until late last night, running some regional workshops in regional WA. But what that did mean, though, is because of the three-hour time difference, I was able to pop in early in the morning to join some of the amazing sessions. So that's been really lovely to be able to do that. And I've actually still been learning quite a lot each day, as I will continue to learn.

So I will share my slides with you. I just wanted to say, though, that Welcome to Country, my goodness, that was such an emotional welcome, so it's absolutely beautiful to see that. So what I'll do is I'll share my slides. I will have the chat open, but I will see how the chat is going. I will be using some breakout groups because as usual, you know, I'm continuously learning in this space. So I'll just share now. And my voice isn't usually this low. I think two days - three days of workshops, I can hear that it's actually decreased a couple of octaves. So I'm not sure what happened there.

So here in WA, the project that we piloted was specifically around neurodivergent students in a tertiary setting here at Curtin. So what I'm going to do is just initially provide you - and it's great that I can see the room with you all there - is to actually focus on developing a workshop directed at our neurodivergent students so we could actually co-create resources. So it was very much around providing a voice to those students to get their feedback on what we could do. So that was really the context.

So what I'm going to do is just provide you with a bit of a background on the objectives of the project, what the workshops were about, and then, really, the feedback we received from the students and how that led to the formation of the development of the resources that we developed.

So the project team was myself. So I'm in the Faculty of Business and Law at Curtin. My background is very much in career aspirations of young people and in the the area of disadvantaged cohorts across the board. I had the great pleasure of meeting a wonderful colleague, who's one of our career advisers at Curtin, Emma Lovegrove, and she actually worked with me in developing and delivering the workshop content. So one of the great joys, isn't it, is when you work on different projects that you get to meet some amazing people. And Curtin is such a huge institution, and I hadn't met Emma before and it was just an absolute delight to have her and welcome her into my life.

The initial project scoping, worked with Dawn Bennett, who's now at Bond University, and Tim Pitman, who's also at Curtin.

So the aim of our pilot - and I also thank Sarah and Olivia, who really helped with that initial scoping to differentiate this project and to really get some traction in this space - is to really -obviously the entire project was to look through the lens of neurodiversity, but also we wanted to really specifically look at - get to understand the employment and career opportunities and barriers for neurodivergent students. And what we really wanted to do was to look at the resources that were available, but then to talk to those students, get their lived experience of navigating these resources, and what we could do to just try and, I suppose, improve the situation for them and give them what they wanted.

So in the end, and you'll see a list at the end of what we've developed, we've developed some specialist workshop resources, some slides, an interactive workbook and a range of tip sheets and resources that came from the voice of these students and we developed some workshops. We'll talk about how we went with those, how we developed them, and the fact that it's now going to become an annual process.

So neurodivergent students, we've heard some amazing, heartwarming, some also fairly challenging stories this week. And this is a space that I suppose gives me incredible joy. But I have to be honest and say also makes me cry, just in terms of the complexity and the depth of challenges some of these young people have.

So the research is telling us that, you know, the transition into the paid market economy for neurodivergent young people is really - their goal in achieving financial independence is often extremely difficult, anxiety ridden, and for some they just consider it completely unachievable.

What we do know - and it's a global issue; it's not just here in Australia - is that in comparison to the skills of those who are considered to be neuronormal, the work that they are able to secure is often low paid, low skilled. It's not full time, so it's very contingent work and part-time, short term, casual and it took them longer to obtain than those who were considered to be neuronormal or neurotypical.

And what we found is that the work they were able to obtain was actually, you know, of a far, far lesser value than their skills would ordinarily ensure that they would get if they were neurotypical. So we know that long-term unemployment is also a key feature, particularly for those with autism.

The most significant barriers to employment that perceive lack of support and information on needs and adjustments, which will lead us to one of the objectives for our workshops, is looking at needs and adjustments. In developing the workshops, we knew that providing a voice in co-creation was a vital component. So before we even started to look at the workshop design, we interviewed neurodivergent students. We ran focus group sessions. We spoke to some of the specialist career advisers, volunteers from - and we'll talk a little bit about the Curtin Specialist Mentoring program, the CSMP that we have - a disability recruitment consultant and then a range of other students.

We then looked at the themes, and from those themes we were really able to look at how we target these workshops that we were going to run. We deliberately set up two quite different workshops which is a key focus of of this co-creation. We opened up the registrations to the broader university and marketed across the various faculties, service areas, postgraduate students, et cetera. The first group was actually two of those students who had actually - who had registered with the CSMP. So those students were predominantly autistic students. So that's a specialist mentoring program where students with autism are trained and they mentor newer students to the university with autism conditions. So that was the first workshop. So they knew each other. So those students had already engaged with each other and knew each other. So that was one workshop.

The second workshop was really interesting, how that morphed is that we desperately wanted it to be an open call to anyone who self-determined or self-diagnosed as being neurodivergent. And that was really critical for us. We didn't want them to have to disclose. They didn't need to disclose. But anyone who self-disclosed and those registrations exploded, completely exploded. We had to put a cap on the numbers and now going forward, we're looking at providing some blended learning and some online versions as well.

So two quite different workshops with quite different dynamics when we ran them. When we advertised the workshops, we came down to the core based on that scoping exercise, providing a voice and co-creation. The first one was around giving them the opportunity to identify their unique strengths, their superpowers, so to speak. Have a section of the workshops where we could actually talk to them about the pros and cons of sharing their needs with employers, the legalities behind the types of adjustments, their rights around asking for adjustments in the recruitment process, how to build a resume when there may be significant gaps and in terms of experience and how they address those gaps, coping strategies for when you don't get the job, which actually came through with a scoping as a significant challenge for these students putting themselves out there and that intense fear of failure and how they come back from that. And then where to access further support.

So the challenge was a fairly full agenda on trying to really give them an introduction and then what we were looking at is that's that structure, some chunked workshops that we can explore these topics further.

The design of the workshop was one of the core elements. We spent a lot of time in this space working out the best way, and that's where I engaged with amazing people like Emma and a recruitment consultant from Maxima, who's a disability recruitment consultant who comes out to the university a day a week, and she came along to the workshops as well.

So we wanted to limit the time. And so that was a challenge, right? It's, you know, how do we cover all of this but have it within a contained period of time in terms of the stimuli that these students were exposed to given, particularly with the second workshop, the broad spectrum of neurodivergent conditions. So we placed a 2.5 hour cap on the duration of the workshop and timing was really important.

Cap on the numbers again so that they weren't overwhelmed in the space, particularly for, again, the second one where they didn't know each other. A venue that provided - and that picture of the venue - it's actually really lovely. Look shocking from the outside, doesn't it? It looks like the bricks. The bricks on the floor need a decent clean, but it was actually a perfect little space. We had windows looking out onto a Japanese garden and we had an alcove where we could create a quiet space to give them permission to just separate themselves from the workshop and go and find that space and sit in that space to just calm their brains down.

Regular breaks. So again, with our advertising, we made sure that we covered the fact that we provided adequate breaks. We give them permission to walk away at any time to take a break in the quiet space or outside. That they could bring a carer, a mentor, or any support person that they wanted. Providing lots of advanced notice. The picture we've got there, we provided pictures with - like in the university, it's probably like Wollongong. Curtin is massive, so we couldn't make the assumption that they would, even if they were Curtin students, they knew where these buildings were. So pictures with directions. This space here was sort of down the ramp, so it's underneath the main building. So to provide them with pictures and directions on how to get there. So to try and remove any of those concerns or any of the anxiety these students might have.

And then to give them the opportunity that they could request further adjustments while they were there. We wanted to run a focus group with the students afterwards. It was completely voluntary, so we provided them with that information upfront with QR codes, what it was about, information sheets, and let them know that if they changed their mind, that was fine.

So we found that the design was a critical element in the actual workshop development. And it was very much a collaborative approach. As I said, one of the joys of working on projects is you get to meet people at your own institution who you've never crossed paths with, and that was that was one of the the absolute nuggets that came out of it.

So on the left hand side, we worked with Maxima who, as I said, come in and provide advice and support, links to employers, to students with disabilities. So we had one of the Maxima consultants who came along to the workshop and talked about how that works. We had one of the facilitators from the Curtin Specialist Mentoring Program helped develop the workshops as well, and she came along. And then we had Emma who actually, has a history of career advice in the disability sector outside of the university, and she helped co-create the workshop. So it was very much - it wasn't just me. I was there to bring the expertise together. So it's always a team approach.

So that was us. That was the team. It was very much a team approach, finding out who worked in this space, talking to them, getting their advice, getting their wisdom, the wisdom from neurodivergent students before we even got to running the workshop. And what I really wanted to do is to find out from yourselves who became your go-to people, right, in working in this space, because it's not necessarily those who are the most obvious. You know, you find those superstars, and sometimes they're chance meeting. So I'm just really interested to know how you found your go-to people to either offer support or to give you advice, or who have amazing resources and information, and how they add value to this space when you're working in this space with disability and neurodivergence, and really if there are any gaps. So who are those go-to people you found fell over, met, have coffee with, how they add value and what sort of support you'd like to see moving forward. So if we could organise some breakout groups, that would be fantastic. Can people hear me? And I just wondered if in the chat or just feedback, really just where you found that support and where you would like more support in terms of networks in helping you facilitate support to neurodivergent students.

And I can't hear - - -

JONATHAN: I'm happy to go. I'm Jonathan Wood here from RMIT Uni. And in our group we discussed or explained where we got supports, and fortunately there were so many to lean on, which was great. One topic we sort of did cover, though, was around some of the - I suppose stereotypes around some of that support around neurodiversity. It's prominently pointed at IT like for some of the employment programs that are out there, and research actually shows us that's not the case. So that would be somewhere where we'd love to see more support.

JANE: Oh, that's that's really good feedback. Yeah, it’s about people, right, not IT.

JONATHAN: Yeah.

JANE: Anybody else?

GINA: Yeah, I'm happy to go. Oh, Julie, you're going. You're in our group. Off you go.

JANE: Hi, Julie.

JULIE: Oh, sorry. I’d actually unmuted totally by mistake there, Gina, but, yeah, I was just going to say that we both have UCEP, which has been really helpful partnering with a DES for support.

JANE: That's awesome. And I think UCEP has been a real theme - when I've been reading the chapters for each morning has been a real theme in terms of support and resources working through this symposium. So that's great. Gina, what did you have?

GINA: So I was in the same group. So, yes, so we both use UCEP. And I guess the other thing that we discussed was the biggest challenge was that there are so many different areas. You know, we've got, obviously, our access and inclusion. It's just that getting that community of practice of who's doing what. So that's still the silos within a large organisation, to how to better support students as well. And I think one of the one things that we noted was that the students know themselves best what they need. And so I think they're themselves a resource.

JULIE: So I was just going to add to that just very quickly, at the end I mentioned to the others in my group how all week I keep thinking I wish academic staff could be listening or hear this because often, you know, I think we're preaching to verses here. Always great to get new information. But, you know, the challenge often starts at the beginning of the - well before for us at the beginning of the university, and you know, it takes a village. I feel like apart from the silos Gina mentioned, which are strong and - but that whole concept of it's not just about one team or the student themselves.

JANE: Yeah, I think that's a great point, Gina and Julie. And in the chat someone talked about grad wise. So I think some really good points there. I'm actually academic, so - - -

JULIE: Yes, I was thrilled with that.

JANE: So I'm teaching focused, and I usually get to meet these students firsthand because I run a creative common core unit. So I usually get about 2,000 students a semester. So that's a great starting point for me. But very much - and I know with Sarah and Olivia when they were first gathering the information with the wider scoping study and that we found is that often the stumbling block can be those academic staff and, you know, some of the comments and the feedback we've had in the wider scoping project have been absolutely heartbreaking.

The issue with neurodivergent students - and it comes through -and you would have all seen it - is they do say it's harder because you can't see it. So you can't see a condition or a challenge. And what was absolutely amazing about this project - and I'll take you back to the slides shortly - is that particularly with the second workshop I was very, very passionate about they don't have to prove to us or tell us what their condition is, if it's been diagnosed or not, because to be quite honest, the number of the ones that we met, they are still on this - they've been on it for years - roller coaster journey of the medical and the support, et cetera. They didn't have to tell us. They didn't have to prove anything. But so many of them actually disclosed their condition. And again, there's complexity and diversity around their neurodivergent conditions.

JULIE: Absolutely.

JANE: Yeah, it certainly came out that because it's not seen - and we did hear some absolutely horrific stories about the attitude of academics. So I'm on that crusade and getting a bit of an army together of just making people aware.

JULIE: Yeah. And I just wanted to add – I’m really interested in how many other people are finding it, but I guess over the last ten years maybe the growth of students who are neurodiverse going to university, which is amazing, but after years of being told they were dumb or couldn't even make it, but it's, I guess becoming a little bit - the amount of students and their variables, academic staff are flat out and often not keen to do anything out of the norm or they see as the norm for neuro-normal people.

JANE: Yeah, absolutely. And look, that's great feedback. And again, it's really having that village of people you can go to and it's often, you know, resources. But I find the resources for me are great but I also want to find those people I can sit down and talk to and have that conversation to get some advice on how to deal with situations where to go for resources. Really, really fantastic feedback from you all.

But what I'm going to do is just really share with you some of - so what we did is just the key findings from the workshop. So two things, our observations, key findings from their engagement in the workshop, but also we ran some focus group sessions with the students who are willing and felt comfortable to afterwards. But we also gave them the opportunity if they wanted to go away, think about it, and then send us their feedback, they were also able to do that. So really what was of value to them? I'm very big in design thinking, Let's keep prototyping. There's no such thing as perfection. We just keep stepping forward. What could be changed or improved with the workshops? What would they like to learn more about, and any other other thoughts that they would like to share.

So I think one of the key benefits of bringing these students together, particularly with the second group where it was they just - they didn't have to be part of the specialist unit. They could literally just come along. They didn't have to disclose, just basically a space where they could learn more and network. Although networking, my goodness, that term filled them with dread. But really to actually get together and learn and talk about their stories and is they love that. They loved realising there were others who had similar challenges, different challenges, felt the same about the recruitment process, felt the same about that term “networking”. And that was if there was anything they got from the workshops, it was that ability to be able to talk to others, learn from their experiences.

And what was fantastic is we had quite a range there, undergraduate, postgraduate, students who were getting towards the end of their degree, those who were just starting their learning journey. So that was actually a really rich perspective that we had there.

The ability to actually go through - we have an interactive workbook and we adapted a questionnaire from the Image Project, which is an EU funded project. It's a profile builder, so it's really around for them to identify their unique strengths. And then how we could actually get them to capture those strengths in an application, in a resume, in an interview. And that there was actually a richness in thinking and responding to situations differently.

So they actually really enjoyed that component of the workshop. They were hungry for information about needs and adjustments. What was surprising to some extent was they, and even those who had been diagnosed and been given a lot of resources, they weren't aware of their ability to be able to ask potential employers. And going to that very frightening recruitment space, that recruitment selection process, to actually ask for adjustments to be made.

And this is a quote from a student. “I wrote notes about appealing the recruitment process because I thought that's been really interesting to learn. It's something I might need to know in the future, you know, like, can I disclose things?” And this was a student who was actually part of that specialist mentoring group. So, again, it's a case of really keep reinforcing with them that they actually - they have that power, they have control and they have that ability to ask for needs and adjustments.

And they enjoyed the interactive workbook because it was a tool that they could take away. We had links to other resources as well, and it gave them a chance to also self-reflect.

But the key takeaway, I can put it in one word “more”, is they just were hungry, hungry for knowledge, for information, and they just wanted more sessions that were specific, more time to actually talk about needs and adjustments, more time to talk about what happens in the recruitment process. Can they go? One of the questions we had, “Can we go and look at the employer's office? Can we go and meet the selection panel first? Can we go and look at the room that they're going to be conducting the interview in?” Because that was an actual area of heightened anxiety for a number of these participants. Now, I'm not saying that's the case for all neurodivergent students, but the participants in the workshops, that was very much one of the areas of anxiety they had. Can we actually have the chance to not just see the questions, because most of them say they have that opportunity, which is fantastic, but to go to the venue, see the room, meet some of the people, where the facilities are, public transport, how to get there, is there parking, et cetera.

So needed more time and they wanted examples. So when we talked about networking, when we talked about recruitment, the sorts of questions they wanted some templates with answers, templates with the questions. So really specific information to try and reduce that anxiety. Who to contact. The big thing is there's a plethora of information out there that can actually be overwhelming in itself, but some specific people - and that's why I asked you the question earlier, who are your go-to people? Because we know there are some amazing resources, but in your space at your university, who can you actually contact? Who can you actually walk into a room to and chat to? So they found there was certainly some loneliness in terms of the people they could speak to.

And those job search skills. Again for a number of them with neurodiversity, they weren't comfortable seeking the people out themselves. It was very much a case of how we can, when we're in such large institutions, bring the people to them in terms of helping them build those job search skills to actually – because a lot of them didn't feel comfortable. There was a lot of anxiety in going as an army of one and seeking out that support from a career adviser, actually even going to the central careers office would be challenging for them. So how we can actually make that less less intimidating and going to them.

And I'm using this quote twice because it really did hit me in terms of how they were feeling. “They” - the we army, they the career practitioners – “want to know what resources I've tried looking for in the past. And, you know, you've got to give up when you're searching the internet, trying to find resources for your condition and then looking for work, it's like I give up or what do you - how do you go about finding it? And it's this and it's that and it's just a plethora of words without guidance. If there was just something that you could say, I just want to know what it is, I want an example.” One sentence. And this is certainly something that Sarah and the team found with the scoping. There actually is a lot of great information out there, but that in itself can be an anxiety ridden example or experience. It's seeing so many words on websites. It’s how you navigate those words and that information to get something quite specific. So that was certainly one of the takeaways.

With the workbook, it was interactive. It was something they could take away. There was space in there for self-reflection, links to other resources. They actually loved - and I know there's some great resources out there about their strengths and characteristics - and this is where we did adapt from the Image Project in the EU. And they did really enjoy looking at the fact that they did have some strengths that they could offer and they had their own specific, unique strengths and characteristics around which they could then build a resume and a statement for potential employers. So this is an example of of the interactive workbook that we have.

But it was definitely more of everything but less of the website. So detailed sheets with examples, samples of questions we could ask, sample statements of responses we could give to questions. So it was very much around we want more, but we want more in a more specific, more condensed format. In detail, templates, examples in one place, and easily digestible bites. That was certainly the message that came through. And I just wondered, just in terms of going to the forum here, is if that's been your experience, you know, how have you gone about providing that necessary support when we do have lots of information but how to bring it down to digestible chunks so that's not overwhelming. And then any additional support or resources that you would like.

And as I said, going back to that workshop participant - and I've highlighted - they just became overwhelmed by the amount of information, they felt like they had to give up and it was just a plethora of words without the guidance. So I just really would love to get some feedback from the room, if you've had similar experiences and what you found useful in this space. And just for Jonathan, yes, the strengths part was based on the Image Project from the EU and I can provide details of that afterwards to be sent out and a copy of the interactive workbook.

JONATHAN: Sorry, Jane, Jonathan here. Would you mind just repeating your question? I think that might get some - help us with responses, overwhelmed with so much information.

JANE: Of course, it's just really if that has been your experience because we've got the the amazing career advisers in the room, that sometimes it's a case of there's too much information and they want details and templates and less of the more. And if that's been your experience as well and where you've gone to get that support and what extra resources you may like.

JONATHAN: And I think that's very typical of some of the tools that are already out there around especially neurodivergent people and that career support. I think I saw a document from - I think it's the Accessibility Hub, that was 52 pages long. And, I mean, I look at that and I go I'm not going to get involved in it. And especially when I don't actually have to – I get nothing from it until page 10, so I think the way you've broken it down there is really, really lovely. And you've considered your audience so very, very well.

JANE: Oh, thank you for that. And I see something there from Katherine saying that, you know, she's had to do the same thing, break that information down because it's overwhelming. It's too much stimuli, too many words on the page. And depending on their neurodivergent condition, that fills them with anxiety and they give up even at that stage when they see all of that. And as you say, Stuart, you know, I get overwhelmed when I go to a website and I've got, you know, 52 links later and I might be getting to what I'm looking for. Step by step. Julie, yep, has made - more education for employers, Julie has indicated.

JONATHAN: And I think that's where a lot of it comes from, too, in that hesitancy, is people worrying about getting it wrong. And I think we, as career advisers and professionals, can really help. Especially our position within university and engaging with employers is opening up those dialogues and helping them get there on that journey.

JANE: Yeah, I think so. And, you know, as Janine has said, one of the great things that's come from this project nationally, and commend Sarah for bringing us all together, is that the resources that we're providing, we're hoping helps deal with some of those issues around where do I find information, where do I get it? And to have these resources to then make available to everyone, specialist consultants that will work – absolutely - who can dissect that information for students. Yes, Sasha, I think that's a great idea.

JONATHAN: And I'm pretty fortunate that I'm that person at RMIT.

JANE: Oh, wonderful. So I might - - -

JONATHAN: Okay. Julie, I think you're on mute. Sorry. I think if you're speaking.

JULIE: Yeah, typical. It's probably better that you can't hear what I'm saying, Jonathan. I was just going to say that success we've had where we've been able to liaise with an employer and do an alternative to that standard interview, you know, where I'm sure we've all had those horrific stories, like I had a student who, when he was asked about his strengths, told them how much he could lift at the gym.

JANE: Love it.

JULIE: You know, so we have asked employers on a couple of occasions to give students a task to do that is appropriate for the job they're going for. And the discussion that kind of came from that when students were tapping away or doing the task was such a great alternative, the employer got what they needed to see and hear. The student didn't have that angst of sitting in front of a pedal.

JANE: Yep, I think that's great. And what a great story for employers. You know, it's a - it's a fairly basic question, what are your strengths, and that's probably the most accurate response you can get. “Well, I can lift X number of kilos”, because, you know, it's the most appropriate response to what can be quite an innocuous and stupid question on some part. And believe me, I'll counter that with the fact - in my past life I worked in HR, so I used to recruit. So I had asked that same stupid question.

JULIE: Same, same.

JANE: So I think it's really important. And I think it's also that what has been humbling for me is I have learned so much talking to these students, and will continue to learn moving forward.

Now I'm looking at the time. So thank you for that feedback there. I'm just going to quickly share with you what our recommendations were and just a quick snapshot of the resources that Janine has been working so hard in the background, bringing everyone's resources together. It was, yeah, more. To be quite honest, after working with, generally, you know, a couple of thousand of first year students every semester, it was actually an absolutely wonderful and refreshing experience to be working with groups of people who are going “give me more information, give me more, you know, what about this? Give me some templates.” And it was just that, you know, they were hungry for more information. But it's how we provide that information that was critical.

Regular workshops is - they clearly wanted more of the workshops. One of the challenges we had is when, particularly with the second one, which was open to everybody, is that we had a number who (1) couldn't cope with the thought of being physically in a location with a number of people, so whether we could offer it online, and we also had a lot of students who were fully online students or inter-state regional. So we're certainly -our next stage is to look at, yes, we'll offer these workshops physically every year, so now we have them scheduled in, but then to develop it specifically for an online audience. So that's a takeaway for us to now start to work.

And to now break the - that first workshop was the pilot to scope what was needed. That was great. But it certainly - the prototyping moving forward, some more specific workshops directed to particular topics with those resources that we've now developed and we'll continue to develop and refine.

And that any workshop that we develop is - it's keeping flexibility in mind. It's a challenge to make it short, short enough to maintain the attention and not overload in stimuli, to providing enough information that they've got a basket of resources that they can take away with them. So that was certainly one of the challenges that we had. And with the resources, this is just a snapshot of some of the resources that we developed as a result of the project. And providing students with that voice is PowerPoint slides that can be adapted by any of the career practitioners out there, an interactive workbook, tip sheets and guides. So these were very much based on the pressure points from the students and also from talking to Maxima, to specialists working in the field, specialist unit.

So for students generally, you know, transitioning to employment, embracing the neurodiversity. Tips for career practitioners. So specifically, we're trying to target the different audiences. Career fairs. We even find it with our own career fairs, they're overwhelming experiences, to actually make sure there's some quiet spaces for those with neurodivergent conditions, and that we can provide - go to them and provide them with the information that they might need.

Tips for employers, and then for the students, this is the little nuggets they wanted not on huge websites, but how to write a resume from a neurodivergent perspective.

Networking reframed. I mentioned the word “networking” to them and they said they would rather have their heads removed than go and network, so it was very much we reframed it as “Okay, you're going and asking for directions. You know, you're a backpacker and you're travelling, you're go and ask someone for directions. People always want to offer help.” So we reframed it and that tended to really shift the level of anxiety.

How to address selection criteria when you don't have a lot of work experience. And as we've heard from one of the sessions this week is that work integrated learning can be quite problematic, so how you address selection criteria, preparing for interviews and how to request for adjustments with job applications and work.

We could produce more. We probably will continue to do more, but this is what we're able to do within the timeframe and the scope of the project. So I hope that's of value. Would they be of value to you, those resources, and really to continue to give us feedback about what else you might like going forward.

So really, I'm hoping that's of value for you. Thank you, Catherine. This is the start for us and I think for all of the universities involved in this project, this was the starting point and we will continue to keep developing resources for us. The workshops and to just keep working with those students. And it's a shared learning experience. To be quite honest, I think I actually learnt more from them than they probably learnt from me, but I'm hoping to maybe shift that a little in the future. So thank you so much.