KYLIE: ... here talking with you all today. Back in 2020, a team of researchers from Curtin University, from Deakin, the University of Wollongong, the University of Tasmania, received a grant from the National Careers Institute to explore the experiences of students with career development learning who had disabilities.

As part of that research project, there was a large team that ran a holistic research project out of Curtin University. They presented yesterday on a series of best practice principles for career development learning for students with disability, and the recording of that will be available online and sent out to all of you afterwards if you're interested. And off the back of that big larger project, each of the universities then took on a subset of one of those best practice principles and applied it at their institution.

So here at the University of Wollongong, we did a project that explored the existing capabilities and experiences of career and accessibility practitioners in providing effective career development learning to students with disability. And we did that in a way that co-designed the project with students with disability. And the goal was to, I guess, increase the confidence of employers, teaching staff and career practitioners in having career kind of conversations.

So today I'm going to introduce our panel because today we get to hear from the students and the staff themselves who delivered the project. And so I will get them to each introduce themselves, starting with Taylor on my right.

TAYLOR: Yeah. So I'm Taylor. I am a student at UoW. I am studying a double degree in law and international studies. I am a part of this research project because I was diagnosed a couple of years ago with a hidden disability and hidden chronic illness, which is called Ehlers-Danlos syndrome. So I have been both studying in high school as well as in university whilst trying to manage the difficulties of studying, as well as the possible career paths whilst also managing a chronic illness.

KYLIE: Right. We've also got Nuala joining us.

NUALA: Good morning, everyone, and hello to everyone online. My name is Nuala O'Donnell. I'm the Associate Director of Student Engagement and Employability here at the University of Wollongong. My role essentially involves working across the institution with our colleagues in faculties to develop, plan and implement programs, strategies and services around employability. So we have a goal at UoW to increase access to all students, especially students that are under-represented in what we call our work integrated learning programs, essentially putting students into work placements as part of their degree. We also have a goal to scaffold career development learning right through the curriculum, and we're making great strides in achieving that. My colleagues here in the room will be pleased to hear that.

Obviously, my interest in this project was really opportune. We were having a conversation within the careers service around the team's sort of confidence level around supporting and working with students with disability, and we found that there was an imbalance in terms of their comfort level, their skill level, et cetera, and they were really seeking reassurance around their approaches, their techniques, their models, et cetera when working with students with disability, that we were duplicating effort, you know, all the various careers consultants were developing their own little toolkits, et cetera. And it just wasn't an effective way to work. So we were really interested in getting involved to provide an opportunity for the team to really hone their skills and skill up.

I'm also the Vice President of the peak body for careers practitioners working in higher education. And really, you know, I was aware that there was a need across the sector as well to sort of develop a one-stop-shop to support our colleagues to work more effectively with students with disability.

KYLIE: Just a reminder for any colleagues joining online, just to make sure we're on mute as well. I'm handing over to Penelope.

PENELOPE: Hello, everyone. My name is Penelope Thompson. I'm a student at the University of Wollongong. I have a paralysed vocal cord. I've developed some neurological and physical problems over the course of my degree. So, yes, I've been sort of navigating doing my studies and working out what subjects I can do and what I can't do with an ever changing set of symptoms.

When I started, I wasn't even aware that there was careers advice available for people with a disability, and so I decided to become part of this project as a team member because I really wanted to learn for myself what services were available. So yes, I've really learned a lot and I hope that my experiences, good and bad, that I've had as a student with a disability, can inform careers advisers and improve the outcomes for future students with disabilities. Thank you.

KYLIE: Thank you. Amy.

AMY: Hi, everybody. My name is Amy. I'm a former student at UoW. I just graduated in December. Yes, thank you. I know. And I'm a wheelchair user full time. I have cerebral palsy. And yeah, I joined this project because I was a student just about to finish my uni journey and I really didn't know what looking for a job was going to look like for me and what to look for in terms of, like, discriminatory behaviours and what my rights are as a person with a disability when I come up against stuff like that. So as soon as I heard about this project, I wanted to jump on it because I thought not only could I help other people with disability in their careers journey, but I could literally help myself at the same time. So it was really great timing and it's been a really valuable project. Yeah.

KYLIE: And Michael.

MICHAEL: Hi everyone. My name is Michael Cooper. I'm a student career development specialist here at UoW, and I was the project lead on this specific project. I started my career as an SLSO working in a year 12 support class at Burrell High School and was working with year 12 students that were transitioning out of high school into transition to work programs and ADEs and DES if that was accessible to them and really had no idea about any of those programs or what they did. And I just remember feeling like at the time, you know, how crazy it was. We spent all this time and all this effort working with these students up to this point, and then just sort of like letting them out into the unknown.

So from there, I actually went over to DES and worked as an employment consultant for a number of years before coming across here to the university. And when the opportunity came for me, you know, it was sort of presented who would like to sort of take charge of this, I was really, really excited about having the opportunity to put this together and maybe sort of cross some of those bridges of knowledge that were missing I thought. So, yeah, that's a little bit about myself.

KYLIE: So I'll just recap what I said. So in terms of how the session is going to work today, we're going to give a little bit of an overview around the research project, around why UoW got involved and what we learned from the research project. Michael is then going to do a demonstration of some of the resources that we developed over the course of the last two years, that will be freely available online. And then we're going to hear a little bit more from our panel in terms of their experiences of career development learning and their experiences about being on the project. And I guess some advice in terms of how we provide effective career development learning to students with disabilities as well.

Okay. So to get us started, just to give you - as I mentioned, this project that we ran at UoW was part of a broader project that was run across multiple universities. And for all of the reasons that kind of Nuala mentioned earlier, is that UoW really kind of saw an opportunity here to do some professional development with our own careers team here at the university around how we could more effectively provide tailored career advice to students with disabilities.

So what the team did over the course of the last two years is Michael and our amazing students led the development of a professional development online series, and that was informed by some pre-survey work that we had done with career and accessibility practitioners about what they needed to know in terms of providing effective career advice.

The team then went away and developed up some online professional learning, and then we piloted it with the team here at the University of Wollongong and got their feedback, made enhancements to the project and kind of conducted some further research with those teams around what their needs would be into the future and what their experiences were.

So over the course of the project we had 17 career and accessibility practitioners involved, and we had 22 students who went and saw a career practitioner and received tailored career advice as part of this project. When we spoke to students about their experience of career advice, one of the really interesting things that we identified was that of the 22 students who participated in this study, only 11 had access to career support over their life cycle. So only 11 students had gone and sought out career advice, and of those 11 students, only eight of those students had engaged in career advice sessions prior to starting at university.

Students identified that being connected with a professionally trained career adviser that had knowledge and experience in working with people with disability would be beneficial. And they - in the hope that CDL activity could focus on guidance about how to disclose their disability to a potential employer; navigating the workforce and work expectations as a person with disability; as Amy said, understanding their rights in a workplace context; and exploring future career and study paths.

When we spoke to career practitioners about their confidence in providing tailored career advice to students with disability, before we started the project, only 33% of practitioners felt somewhat confident in providing tailored career advice. So as Nuala was kind of saying, there was differing levels within the team about who felt confident having those conversations. And those practitioners identified a whole range of external resources and networks that they were relying on to develop their knowledge in that space.

One of the things that really kind of arose that practitioners wanted out of the professional development modules was that they really wanted to understand how they could support students in disclosing their disability and both for students and for practitioners, that really arose as a really key theme in this research project. And practitioners often spoke about undertaking a career consultation and not knowing whether or not someone had a disability or how to support that student to confidently disclose their disability to an employer as well.

By the time we had finished the project and a series of professional development online workshops with our team, 100% of our practitioners identified they felt somewhat confident in providing CDL opportunities with students with disability, and they gave us a lot of recommendations about where to take the project from here, which we'll talk about at the end of the session.

So before we kind of get into what our experiences were on the project, Michael's just going to come up and show some of the outputs so that you could visualise them in terms of some of the professional development learning that's been developed for career advisers.

MICHAEL: Hi, everyone. Thanks for coming today and thank you to Kylie for that overview of the broader project and the research finding attached to it. We've put a lot of hard work into these modules and all the research aspects involved in the coordinating of the research project, so we're really excited to be presenting this to you today.

We have a lot of time allocated to the panel and Q&A discussions where I know we'll touch on some of the deeper justifications around why we chose certain topics and the process in which we develop that content. The student leaders played such an integral role in the development of the content that I don't want touch on that too much in this demonstration. So for now, for the sake of this demonstration, I just want to focus on the platform that we used, which was Open Learning, and how we adhered to principles of universal design for learning throughout that content, and how Open Learning, the website that we used to house the online learning modules, really facilitated that for us.

So what you're looking at here is just the landing page for the modules. Like if you were to open up the link, this is what you'd be faced with. This is really just more for front-facing marketing purposes, you know, for people who would like to know more information about the course before they register. If you do want to jump in, it's obviously a matter of clicking joining now, similar to signing up to any other website that you have in the past. There's just a short, straightforward process to setting up your own profile and then it lets you in.

The home page, which you can't see here, it just has our acknowledgement of country, which you saw at the start of today's session. The colour scheme of that just conveniently matches the colour scheme of the aesthetics that we went with for the rest of the module. So it sits quite nicely there, which was a nice little addition. From there it just prompts you to access the course modules here, which you can see in the top left-hand corner in that menu bar, which lands you here in this introductory module section. Here it has everything you need to know about the project, how to navigate through Open Learning. The site itself is really, really free flowing, and it's just really easy to navigate through. Once you click into a section, there are “next” prompts in the bottom right-hand corner of every page as you move through the module, and you can see in the top right-hand corner there's a progress bar which tracks how much of the subject content you've completed as you move through the course.

As mentioned previously, we really wanted to focus on ensuring the modules follow the principles for universal design for learning. For anyone who isn't across what that is, universal design for learning is just a set of principles for curriculum development that gives all individuals the equal opportunity to learn. This is mainly facilitated through ensuring there are multiple means of which information can be gathered and assessed throughout that learning experience. It's something that all educators should strive to do and implement in their curriculum development, but it's critical for ensuring that people with disabilities can access their learning. So with that in mind, it was obviously something that we really focused on achieving throughout these modules.

Open Learning really, really allows this, which was amazing. You can create various learning activities, which you can see here on the screen. So to the left-hand side, throughout the modules, there are various like quizzes which are interactive and prompt you to get the right answer. There's no like pass/fail aspects to it. We just really wanted to make an Open Learning experience for everyone. And as you can see on the right-hand side of the page, there's learning activities throughout. This was just the first learning activity. I think there was about 4 or 5 throughout the entire course, which has an attached case studies to it which are downloadable. So if you ever wanted to bring this to a team meeting or something like that, all the resources are downloadable and you could do it in a face-to-face setting.

So the cool thing about Open Learning, and what I've found one of the coolest functions of it, was the way it facilitates a really, really strong learning community. So, for example, if you finished this learning activity one, you post your answer in the text box at the bottom right-hand corner there. And then, as you can see on the left-hand side of the page, your responses are then posted on a message board below that and there's a comment function for all the answers. So as we found our career practitioners and our accessibility inclusion staff move through the content and they were posting their answers, they were also commenting on other people's answers and, you know, creating a really open dialogue about how they went about approaching that certain activity, which just really facilitated a really great learning community as the staff went through the content.

On the right hand side of the page here, you can see one of our amazing student leaders, Taylor. In that video there, she's interviewing Paul Harper, who is - I just want to get his title right – he is Associate Professor Paul Harper, who is a leading international and comparative disability rights and advocacy. He's also a lead legal academic at the University of Queensland and a person who is blind. And they have like a great interview with each other discussing - in one half it's about working rights of people with disabilities and the other half is around the legalities of disclosing your disability in the workplace.

We also have a great 15 minute interview with Amy, who provides a really, really great open discussion about communicating and communicating with people with disabilities. And I think it's probably one of the high points of the entire course. You know, at other points, we were able to - with permission from ADCET, the Australian Disability Clearing House for Education and Tertiary - something, something - I'm sorry, Darlene, I’ve probably butchered that acronym - we were able to use from them a virtual presentation from Daniel Valiente-Riedl, who is the General Manager of Job Access. In that presentation, he's talking about the Employment Assistance Fund, which is a bracket of federal funding which people with disabilities can access to set up workplace modifications. Can the people online confirm whether they can see the slides or not for us?

- Yeah, they've come up now. Thank you.

MICHAEL: Excellent. Thank you. Well, I'm pretty much on my last slide now anyway. Okay. All right, cool. Where I was up to? Okay, cool.

We also, with the help of a fantastic graphic designer called Anna Figgins, were able to design not only just the content for all the website, all the backgrounds for the slides and things you're seeing now, but she also put together these really amazing like custom fact sheets for us which are all downloadable off the site and make really, really great tabletop resources, you know, to have on your desk when you're having career consultations with students and to hand out, you know, as these content - as these subjects come up and may need to be discussed further or provide further reading for that student or that client.

And finally, you know, we also present quite an extensive list of employment programs, initiatives and funding brackets which are available to students, or people with disabilities in high school and tertiary environments, but also covering what is available to the general population of people with disabilities in post-education contexts. The great thing about Open Learning was we had the ability to embed the promotional videos from these various programs directly onto the feed as you move throughout the modules. You can see, you know, for the section that we created on the Australian Network on Disabilities here on the right-hand side of the page, we were able to implement some of their own content from their YouTube channels and things like that.

So from here, I think we should probably delve into a little bit more about what we covered in the modules and how we came about making the choices about what that content was. So I'm going to hand back over to Kylie, who's going to facilitate a bit of a panel conversation for us.

KYLIE: Okay. Thanks, Michael. For those in the room and those online, we're going to ask a couple of questions to the panel to start off with. And then if you've got - we'll have some time towards the end for people online and those in the room to ask questions as well directly to the panel. So for those who are online, just put any questions into the chat and we'll pick them up towards the end of the panel.

Now, just bear with me for a second because I'm just going to flip the view of the camera, so I might just need a little bit of help there, so that you can see the panel. Okay, so we're just going to click to the panel view for those online. Please let us know if you can't hear us. So just checking that those online can hear us, if that's okay.

- We can hear you fine. Thanks.

KYLIE: Wonderful. Thank you. Okay. So maybe just to get us started, this first question is to everyone on the panel. So why is tailored redevelopment learning so important for individuals or students with disability? Taylor.

TAYLOR: Yeah, I think because each person's disability is so different than - as well as their goals, and as well as their experiences, and as well as their specific tailored education is also so different, that if we have a limited stock-standard response to treating people with disabilities and how their future is, what will happen is a lot of things will be limited. A lot of people's experiences will be negative and they'll be put into boxes of what they're able to do in the future.

However, if we go into discussions and open discussions with students with disabilities, it not only allows them to feel heard, it allows them to know that their disability isn't then the end for them. It doesn't then limit what their dreams or their goals or their interests will limit them in the future.

If we go into conversations with students with disabilities with an open mind of listening to their goals and listening to what they want for their future and then tailor it to their disability and what their reality looks like due to their health, it then creates a different conversation and creates a very different experience for them, because a lot of these students have most likely been fighting for recognition and for just a lot of the time being given the opportunity to express what they're wanting to do without immediately being limited. If those conversations are already tailored to how can we help you, how can we listen to you, then it changes the conversation and it will ultimately change what they think is accessible to them.

KYLIE: Thanks, Taylor. That was wonderful. I think that whole thing about being seen in that.

TAYLOR: Yeah. Yeah.

KYLIE: Nuala?

NUALA: Thanks, Kylie. How do I add to that? That kind of summed it up. But look, career development learning, we know it's lifelong and it's life wide. And just having those tools to support students to make effective career development learning decisions and life decisions, career decisions is so essential. And, you know, the graduate labour market is becoming increasingly complex to navigate. It really is tough out there. You know, the recruitment processes are tough. So if students aren't making decisions that are centred around who they are, what they want from life, what their values are, what their skills are, then they're not going to end up in the right job, for the right reason, at the right time, in the right organisation, which is kind of career development learning at its most basic form.

And as Taylor said, you know, making the wrong decision, getting into the wrong organisation can be detrimental and it can be detrimental, especially for students or people with disability, you know, it can set them back. It can just knock their confidence. And we don't want that to happen. You know, we want to see our students, we want to see people in the right organisations, in organisations that are supportive, that are disability confident, et cetera. So that's my tuppence worth.

KYLIE: Thank you, Nuala. Penelope, what are your thoughts in terms of why CDL is so important?

PENELOPE: I guess I can speak to this as someone who for many years wasn't aware that this kind of support was available. So I just kind of bumbled through most of my degree and my working life without the knowledge that I could ask for reasonable adjustments. And at university, you know, some subjects I would start and I think, oh, well, I physically can't do this, so I would just drop out. And that actually changed the course of my degree significantly. And I'm sort of at a point now where I'm thinking, gosh, you know, I'm actually not getting qualified to do the things that I was really passionate about because I didn't know that I could ask for those reasonable adjustments and I didn't feel confident to - well, I might have asked, but they just kind of went, “Oh, no, you can't go on that field trip. Bad luck.”

Yeah. So I just feel like it's really vitally important that students with a disability have access to career advisers who can teach them about their rights as a student with a disability and also their working rights. Because I've also had terrible experiences in working places where, you know, like, you just get wiped out because you're a casual employee and they just don't want to go there, you know, so they'd rather just make excuses and just say there's no work and just, you know, shuffle you under the carpet.

So, yeah, it can be very, you know, as both of you mentioned, very - well, it's disabling to have, yeah, and depressing, and it can make your physical physical conditions worse if you're suffering all this discrimination and setback and so forth.

So, yes, I would say it's absolutely vital to have tailored career advice for students with disabilities. So I would encourage all of you to learn all you can and really listen to your students when they say, “Oh, well, you know, I've got this problem or, you know, I started this course and the lecturer doesn't seem to care”, you know, to actually fight for them and give them the information to have the opportunities to complete the courses that they want to complete. I think it's everybody's right to have those opportunities. So good on you all for being here today and wanting to learn. That's great.

AMY: I really like what you said there, Penny. I think it reflects my experience with not really knowing what I had the rights to ask for in terms of learning about career opportunities. I know in my high school experience, I just got the stock standard career advice, so dress well, have interview answers ready, that sort of thing. And I think - I graduated high school in 2009, so it might be quite different nowadays, but I think my advisers in high school had this idea of “Amy's not any different than anybody else, so she should have the same things as everybody else, but the reality is when you are a person with a disability, you are going to experience unique barriers to your career opportunities. So I think acknowledgement should come first and people will only acknowledge if they feel empowered to give you the right information.

So career development learning is great in that it empowers advisers to address these topics with confidence to their students, and then the students feel empowered with that information to go on and then go into their careers knowing what they can ask for, knowing what they're capable of, and knowing how to speak about the issues that come up with confidence and empowerment. And I think knowledge is power, and that's what this resource is, right? It's knowledge and empowering people.

KYLIE: Thank you, Amy. Michael, what are your thoughts in terms of why CDL is so important for ---

MICHAEL: I think Amy was reading off my notes. She just stole my answer. What I was going to say was, you know, in a utopian world, it's not any more important than it is for a general student, and as we're becoming more accessible and inclusive as a society, hopefully that is the case. But as Amy and all the other student leaders have touched on, the reality is is that students with disabilities, people with disabilities suffer or have to go through, you know, some pretty major setbacks, whether it's employer attitudes, you know, their own experiences, and they’re often coming into career consultations with a certain sense of anxiety around, you know, employment as a whole, which usually, you know, isn't that related to their disability in a strict sense. And I think that if we can empower career consultants to, you know, have that confidence in providing career development learning to students with disabilities, they're going to be able to then pass that on and develop that agency within that student as well or with that client as well, and you know, it's going to sort of lead to more positive outcomes for people with disabilities in employment settings. So for that reason, I think it's really, really vital.

KYLIE: So, I mean, obviously, one of - I mean, these are some of the reasons why we all got involved in the project and the reason why we wanted to kind of develop these professional learning modules. You know, one of the things that we did in the development of these modules is we pulled together an expert working group to start off with. So university lecturers, career practitioners, our students with lived experience together. And we identified - that expert working group met a number of times over the course of the project and really kind of provided theory to us in terms of how the modules were then subsequently developed.

But Michael, I'm wondering if you can talk a little bit more about actually kind of on the ground from a project perspective, you know, what was the process that we went through from start to finish? And then I might ask our students then to talk about why we picked the topics that we picked. Yeah.

MICHAEL: Cool. So as Kylie mentioned, there was a sort of broader working group that we met with, I think about five times at regular intervals throughout the development of the project, just to sort of touch base and see where we're at. In the initial stages, it was really around, okay, like how is this going to look? You know, there was no, you know, preconceived idea that it was going to be an open online learning resource like this, self-paced. You know, there was discussion around whether it was going to be a series of workshops and just a series of, you know, downloadable resources that we then offered with instructions around how to present them.

We eventually did decide on the online option. And, you know, obviously lots of conversations around what the content was actually going to have, how we're going to deliver it, lots of discussions around universal design for learning, as I touched on in my demonstration around how we were going to ensure that the content wasn't just presented in one medium and that it was going to be interactive and engaging throughout the entire course. It is about five and a half, six hours long to get through all the content, so there's a lot there. And yeah, as we sort of moved through the development of the project, there was initially a bit of a beta phase of it, which was what the career consultants and the accessibility inclusion staff members used when they were developing the research - I'm sorry, when they were participating in the research side of the project.

And based off their feedback, we then sort of made the final version, which is where it's at now, which is what you guys will be using if you were to jump on and use the modules. So that was sort of, yeah, the process of logistics of it all.

KYLIE: Yeah. And Penelope, Amy, Taylor, why did you guys decide on these particular topics? Why were these topics - because I remember at the start we had a really long list of stuff that we could cover off in these professional development modules. We ended up settling on like our top four. What were they and why did we land on these?

AMY: So I'll start because I worked on the first module that you'll come across when you look at this content. I worked on communication with people with disabilities, and, funnily enough, some of the feedback we got for this module initially on the beta site was why do we need to know this stuff, you know, which said a lot to me about unconscious bias that people come into learning about disability with, you know, why is it important to learn how to talk to someone who is blind versus someone who's deaf? What are the nuances talking to someone with an intellectual disability versus a physical disability? What are the kind of things you should be aware of when meeting someone in person versus meeting someone online? What are all these situations going to look like? How can you interact with this person in a way that makes them feel seen and comfortable in a way that leaves them feeling like you know what you're doing and you know what you're doing interacting with these.

Because like the statistics that you touched on earlier, so many people just have anxiety around talking about disability because we don't want to offend, we don't want to say the wrong thing, we don't want to do the wrong thing. And the only way that we can get over that initial hurdle is to talk about it, right? So the initial communication module is doing that for you. It's giving you the language, it's giving you the tools to then come away and say, “Okay, how would you like to talk about your disability? What is the language that makes you feel seen and heard and strong and how can we talk about that in the context of your career? What will talking about your disability look like for you in the context of your career? What do you think you will need and how can we make that happen for you?”

Yeah, that was my input in terms of the communication module. Yeah. Again, just about empowerment and giving people the language and the tools.

KYLIE: Penelope, what were some of the topics and how did we land on them and why were they important?

PENELOPE: Well, I think communication is obviously important, and since I've developed a voice disability on top of a few other things, yeah, you know, personally I've found that it has been a barrier in some cases. When learning went online and my voice wasn't really up to even speaking on a microphone, I would, for example, ask the lecturer if I could chat only, and often that request was just ignored and I wasn't able to participate in the lectures fully, because I'm typing away madly and then not really getting any response.

So I think it's important to realise that, you know, a lot of people think of disability as like, oh, it's just someone in a wheelchair, or something really visible, but often it can be an invisible disability. And I also have some other neurological and energy production problems which are invisible and people look at me and think, “Oh, she seems really fine. You know, she's dressed in track pants and sports shoes. She must be really fit.” But actually that's far from the case. So yeah, communication is important.

But also the other three modules - I'll have to take a breath for a minute. I run out of oxygen. We did a module on disclosure, and because I'm an older person and I had quite a bit of working experience, I didn't disclose - well, I did disclose and then got - basically lost my job, and then in the next job I didn't disclose, but then when I lost my voice and it became evident, self-evident, I lost my job. So yeah, I found disclosure was an incredibly important topic.

And also at university, I found that in my enrolled subjects, sometimes I would disclose but I would just get ignored and I didn't get accommodated. So yeah, so that moved on to the rights of people with disability, which I was pretty ignorant about, actually. So yeah, working rights and, you know, rights at university to get accommodations is incredibly important.

And then the final module was the Disability Employment Services programs and financial funding available for students and working people with a disability. Yeah, I've had a lot of personal experience with that, and I just feel I was pretty ignorant about a lot of these things. So I've learnt a lot and my personal experience, you know, has been that if I'd known early on, I wouldn't have plodded on trying to stick with Austudy, which is, you know, the lowest form of financial support for a student with disability. Yeah. And then if you go on to Jobseeker with the medical concession, it's fine but then you've got to be having these Disability Employment Service interviews and stuff, which can be a total nightmare.

So it's really great if the career practitioners, career advisers can learn about all the ins and outs of these government programs, just so that they're aware of what the students might be bumping up against in real life. Because, you know, as I mentioned before, it can be very, very disheartening, very, very disabling to be struggling with all these government programs and not aware that there might be other things available which might be more supportive. Yeah. Okay. Thank you.

KYLIE: Taylor, what was your like - which modules did you think were really important?

TAYLOR: So as I said before, I'm a law student, so I very much liked looking into the rights and the law around what is already in place for people with disabilities. That kind of came hand in hand with disclosure. So even as a 21-year-old kind of in a working environment with a hidden disability, what I really liked about this research project was I was able to use my education to kind of research the legislation around that. But also then as someone with a disability working, knowing what I was actually able to ask my employer, and what I was also - what I should have expected from them legally, and being able to actually just have that knowledge of go, “I'm sorry, I'm going to need to have this in place as a part of my job. And then this is why you have to provide it for me.”

So even learning about that was empowering whilst doing the project itself. So what we found was a lot of people didn't actually know what they could ask for. A lot of people didn't actually know when they were being treated illegally and what was already in place and the support that was already built into the foundations of the employability schemes that have already been in place, what is already there for them.

And we found that once - it was very interesting as we kind of brought the content to the working group, it actually surprised some of us. We were like, “Oh, we didn't actually know that was in place. We didn't actually know that we could say no to this. We didn't know that we could ask for this.” So if people who are working specifically on this project, if some of the support that we had access to that we weren't even using that was a surprise to us, then a lot of teenagers and a lot of uni students who haven't actually - may not have wanted to even go out and ask in case that they were told no, if a lot of people just didn't even know that these things were already in place for them, then they were already starting the negative of what they could ask for.

Sowe found it was really important to integrate the law side of this and the disclosure side of it, because if it was communicated to students early on that these are your rights and these are what the government has decided support that should already be there for you, it already gives them a leg up of knowing what they - gives them awareness of when they may be mistreated before it can snowball into something that is a lot worse in a lot of cases.

KYLIE: I'm really keen to - at the end of the panel, we'll talk a little bit more about the recommendations that the career practitioners that participated in this study made in terms of what should be developed in the future, you know, and what future direction these modules should take. But I'm really keen to hear from all of you as to, you know, what future direction do you think the modules could take? And if you had your time again, would you do anything differently? And I might throw to Michael first because he's probably thought about this question the most, I think, out of everyone.

MICHAEL: What would I do differently? I think the input of the student leaders, you know, by the final product was so integral and a key part of how the modules looked at the end and the content that it had in it. So I think that probably developing and integrating you guys a little bit more earlier on in the content, as opposed to sort of coming in with some preconceived ideas about what I thought it was going to say and what it was going to have in it was, I think, really important. Sometimes, you know, my language can be a bit blunt. I have a certain level of comfortability around people with disabilities and talking about disabilities. And I think, you know, Alicia Ford from the university, who I know is tuned in today, you know, I've worked with her quite a lot at the back end of the project about, you know, there's something about 26, 27,000 words, you know, throughout the modules, and she worked with me quite extensively on the language and how I was going to present things and say things. So thank you so much to Alicia for doing that. She did that all voluntarily. But I think probably working with her a little bit earlier on to make sure I wasn't, you know, having to redo a lot of things ---

AMY: I can add to that too. Like, I myself didn't know a lot of disability terminology coming into this project, and I am a person with a disability, so I think it's important to remember there's always something to learn. But even small things, like the difference with calling someone “hearing impaired” versus “hard of hearing”, just the implication of being impaired before you even know the person's name, versus something like hard of hearing makes a big difference in your interactions with people with disability. And the people with disability themselves might not even know these labels. And so the more knowledge, the better, really.

And I think initially we went a bit cam on everything that we wanted to cover and it was just too much. It was too much information. So my ideal would be more, but we don't want to bombard people at the same time. So we really had to sort of tailor down what we thought was the most, most basic, most important information. And I think we did a pretty thorough job of that in the end. But yeah, definitely, there's always more.

MICHAEL: Yeah, we definitely bit off way more than we could chew. And there was a point about two-thirds the way through, we sort of had to put the brakes on and really sort of come together and think about what we were going to present and how we were going to present it. And we sort of made some adjustments to content. We saw we were down to six modules before and put some more kind of achievable timeframes around some of what we're going to be delivering on. And, yeah, that was a really great process to go through and it really enabled us to go back to what we already had created and finalise it and really put finishing touches on all of that content.

So yeah, we're so proud of the suite and how it looks now and what we've been able to present. So yeah, that's probably what I would do differently.

TAYLOR: And I think on that, what I'm going to talk for the group, but what was something that was very surprising for us while we were trying to create this, and it was kind of touched on before, was some of the feedback we were getting was, like, why do we need to know this? So we almost had to remove our own bias and our own personal experiences, because with Michael having worked in this area for so long and then us student leaders who have lived this, it's a no-brainer of why people should know this. So of course you need to know this. Like what do you not understand of why this is so important?

But then we kind of had to take a step back and go some of these people may not have a single - know of a single student in their school that has a disability. It could then go further. They may have invisible disabilities or health issues that the career practitioners may not themselves even acknowledge as a disability. So we kind of had to take a step back and remove our own bias and try and really articulate why this is so important for everyone who has a place to be able to advise any student on their career is the fact that – I was on a panel a while ago and someone said - got asked a question of why should people care about disability rights? And what she said was the minority of being in a disability and being a person with a disability is the only minority that people can join, and is the only minority that people could be added to later in life.

And that means that one student, when they start in year 10 or year 11, may not be a person with a disability, but by the time they're in high school, their health could have gone completely downhill, they could have had an accident, they could have had something like that. And all of a sudden they are looking at a completely different set of options for the rest of their life. If they're having conversations with a career practitioner who wasn't aware of what was there for students with disability, and suddenly they have a completely different life, there still needs to be that adaptability of being able to talk through their options. So that was kind of why we had to step back and remove our own bias to make sure that we could communicate properly why this is so crucial and so important to everyone.

KYLIE: When I think personally for me about what I took away from the project - I just think you're all fabulous and it's been wonderful to work with you all. So that's the first thing. But the second thing I think is, you know, career support, career advice and career development learning is so fundamental to what students need to successfully navigate their life. It is, you know, as part of the UN's sustainability goals, it's a human right. Everyone should have access to career development learning. And so over the last few years, I've taken on a couple of projects around this that’s looked at career advice for different cohorts of students; students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, students from regional, rural or remote backgrounds, and now, obviously, students with disability as well. And I think what's really clear to me is across Australia we've got amazing individuals, and you guys are online and in this room, who really care about the students that we're working with. But from a national policy and program level, we are not servicing our youth properly in terms of providing effective career support for students at a policy level, at a national level.

And I think this project for me really shone the light on that. So I think that's kind of really what I took away from it. And I think we've got a really important role here in having conversations with the government about how we provide accessible and equitable career advice to every single student across Australia. How do we do that in a way that meets the needs of those students? So, I mean, that's kind of what I'm taking away from the project, but I'm really keen to hear from you guys as well about what you took away from it.

AMY: Well, it's been pretty invaluable for me. I mean, learning about what rights I have as a person with a disability, and not only what I'm entitled to ask for, but what my employer is entitled to give me was something that I know - I've been on interviews and stuff. And, you know, I've had interviewers tell me - this is when I was a lot younger, maybe like 18, 19 - you know, “You have such a great personality. We love your vibe, but we just don't know what it's going to look like to get you around the office.” And I'm like, “Oh, cool. What am I supposed to do with that information?” And now I know that is a subtle form of discrimination. But back then I just thought, “Oh, well, there's nothing I can do about that. So next.”

Whereas now I would be able to tell them you're entitled to a certain amount of funding from the government to make those adjustments, to make your workplace more accessible. You know, adjustable tables, technology on the computer to make using the computer easier, a whole bunch of things, and ramps, you know, number one, ramps versus stairs. And it's that sort of stuff that not only empowers me, but empowers my potential employer to then go, “Oh, so that's how that's going to work. I can see you working in this environment with those adjustments in place.”

You know, I think Graeme Innes said this last year, he's a disability representative and advocate, and he said, “You can't be what you can't see”, right? And I think a lot of these issues that we come across is just a fundamental lack of imagination, about not only what is possible in the workplace, but what people with disabilities can do and what people with disability are capable of. And I think if we just open our minds and we start with these basic, basic tools, we can start to visualise people with disabilities succeeding and actually thriving in these environments. We just have to be given the opportunity. And that starts with the language. It starts with people giving us a chance, right? And that's what this project does. It gives us a chance, and I think that's really exciting.

MICHAEL: Just what I can say I got out of the project, and I think Taylor touched on this as well, because my whole working background has been working with people with disabilities in career situations, you know, getting to the project and developing this and delivering it to my wider team who would just work, you know, genuinely in careers with the wider student population here at UoW, and sort of getting this kickback of why is this important? You know, after we'd spent three or four months pulling our hair out, like, “What do you mean why is this important? This is obviously important.” So going to have to go back into the modules and really highlight why. And we sort of put some student statements and stuff throughout the content just to sort of drill those messages home.

But yeah, for me, it was coming out of it going, okay, like probably an increased vocabulary around being able to explain to people who maybe don't come from my background why it's so vital that we can relate this message to students with disabilities or clients with disabilities. So yeah, that was certainly what I get the most out of it.

PENELOPE: I think, yeah, I just learnt so much about the language around disability, about disclosure, and I realised that I'd been hesitant about kind of labelling myself as having a disability, and kind of living in a bit of a fantasy land thinking, “Oh, well, I'll get better, I'm sure. I just won't mention it.” Yeah, so having to, yeah, kind of come to grips with it myself was really important, by just spending six months just really delving into it and learning about all the aspects, learning about, you know, working rights, reasonable adjustments, you know, that was incredibly important for me.

So now, yeah, I'm actually going to have to put that into practice. I've got only two more subjects to go at university, so I'll be definitely enlisting support from disability services and career advice to get all the help that I need, and then to stand up for my rights at any future work places. Yeah, I'll definitely be having this knowledge of what I'm entitled to and not feeling like, “Oh, well, actually, you know, I've got this”, and, you know, so I think, yeah, just the confidence, the knowledge has given me the confidence that, yeah, like I have legal rights and I should just ask for them instead of feeling ashamed or embarrassed.

So yeah, personally it's been really quite empowering for me being part of this process. So I'm sure all the knowledge that I've learnt will slowly filter in, you know, over a long period of time. But now I know I've got people around me who can support me. I think that's been the number one thing that I'm taking away from this project.

AMY: Just to expand on that Penny, I think a lot of it is stigma, right? And a lot of it is internalised ableism. Like, we get a lot of subtle ableism externally but, of course, if you come across that every day, you're going to start pulling that inward and going, “Oh, it's my fault, it's me that's being the inconvenience. It's me that's getting in the way.” And you become your own limiter, in a sense. You limit yourself. I think this project, in terms of disclosure specifically, it not only says here is the way that you can disclose your disability in a way that is empowering, but also if you don't want to disclose because ableism exists, that's okay too. You know, we give you a variety of options so that you can pursue career development in a way that is most comfortable for the individual student, whether that looks like being an open advocate, like myself and these guys on the panel here, or if you're at a place where you're not quite ready to accept that aspect of your identity, that's totally valid, too. I think that's important touch on as well.

TAYLOR: I think, just bouncing off that, throughout my high school experience - I'm pretty young; so I've only been out of high school about three-ish years - but I had no diagnosis or any form of formal acknowledgement of my deteriorating health throughout my entire duration of high school. And I had had six rounds of surgeries during my high school experience and no formal acknowledgement was even coming from my medical team, let alone my teachers or my casual employees, advocates or any of those types of things. And when I had zero formal acknowledgement about my deteriorating health from pretty much every aspect of my life, but knowing in myself that I maybe didn't know to the extent during high school that there's possibly going to be things that limit what I am going to be able to do in the future, it was then very difficult to have conversations about even my degree of what my workload can be. Can I manage a double degree? Can I manage moving to a university that isn't even at home when I'm not even knowing what my health condition is like? And I did not want to use the word “disability” or even “chronic illness”, or any of those light up words.

And it's been my journey of kind of being comfortable with that own terminology and being able to kind of know what is accessing to that, let alone if students are having to fight with the NDIS program, they're trying to be accepted into that. I am lucky enough to be on that program, but that was a fight to get on that. It was a fight to have these conversations and all of that. And quite often students who are going into this, as Amy said, they may not even in themselves be willing to put labels on their own experiences that as soon as that label is put on, then they have access to all of this information. If a student is sitting down not wanting to say that they're a student with a disability, they then may not be told of what an employer can say and what they can ask and what shifts they can say no to because of health conditions.

So that kind of understanding, especially around disclosure, can be very intricate and very case-by-case basis, because how does someone disclose that they have a disability when they wouldn't even say they have one to begin with? Like, it's very intricate and very case-by-case basis. So having this knowledge out there for career practitioners to be able to even see, okay, the student may have this, this and this that they can see, but they aren't using the language that someone who is formally either diagnosed or willing to accept that language may use, but still being able to give them support and still be able to give them knowledge of what the future may hold without necessarily going, “Well, you're disabled, so you have access to this and this and this”, but like being able to tailor it to what specifically someone may need. Like I don't need ramps to get into my workforce, but I need time to have three medical appointments a week during my 9 to 5. And I actually work with Kylie, so that's very helpful in my current working arrangements, but they're very different things and very different adjustments that every person may need.

So having people early on that have the knowledge to be able to give these students what could possibly happen and what is available to them, no matter what their health looks like, is really important, I think.

- And a last comment ---

NUALA: Yeah, sure. And just just connecting Kylie's point around, you know, the policy piece and the policy platform, and having access to advice and guidance, et cetera, progress has been made, which is great. And you know, I think CICA, the Career Industry Council of Australia, NACCAS, CDAA, the Career Development Association of Australia, have done some fabulous advocacy work in this space. And, you know, in the last five years we've actually seen, you know, big shifts as well with the establishment of the National Careers Institute, which essentially funded this project. So on a positive note, that's really, really good.

But I think the next step now is professionalising the industry and ensuring, you know, in our educational institutions, in high schools, in universities, in the VET sector, that careers advisers are given the opportunity to upskill and to undertake a formal career development qualification, if they don't have one, and that they're given the time as well to do that. And we start to build those communities of practice and work across sectors as well, I think that's really, really important.

KYLIE: I'm just conscious I want to give the audience online and face to face an opportunity to ask questions. Penelope told me not to ask her this question because it's been too long since she was in high school, she told me. So we're going to leave it to Amy and Taylor, you know. This project - and I'll share the final report with everyone - makes a lot of recommendations about what needs to be done at a national or at a sector level. But you've got a group of career advisers sitting in front of you and online, and what would be one thing that would have helped you during your high school journey that you think would have been useful?

AMY: Gosh. Just to have somebody not be afraid to tell me I was different. I think that would have been really valuable. I think everybody at that time - I know it's very different now, but at that time it was all equality, equality. You're the same. You're the same. You're the same. Which is a nice idea but the reality is we are different and we're going to need special accommodations, and we're going to have different ways of getting around unique problems that if it's not addressed first, nothing can be done about it.

And in that way, too, I would stress that it's important not to be afraid to make a mistake. The language is always evolving, and it's entirely unique to every individual. As long as you approach a student in a way that is respectful and your tone is uplifting, as opposed to derogatory, I think your student is really going to appreciate your candidness more than anything. So don't let the fear of making a mistake or insulting anyone stop you from delivering the information that you know you have to empower your student. I think would be my answer to that question.

TAYLOR: I think kind of a really simple one, but it could be really important is, as I kind of touched on a bit, if a lot of students are expecting when they walk into a room where they know that they are going to have to talk about their disability and how it affects them, they are from the get-go going to most likely - and this is a blanket statement and a generalisation - but they will most likely already be on the defence, or already be ready to fight and be kind of - not devalued, but kind of going, o”kay, yeah, but”, or, “Yeah, okay, I kind of understand that but let's look at this instead”, or those kind of disheartening, disvaluing conversations. There are expecting that before they walk in the room because a lot of people who have been struggling with a disability their whole life, that's almost a lot of conversations that happen. It's more the exceptions when it's a good conversation, which is very sad and very unfortunate.

But to even just be a conversation, even if nothing necessarily gets set in stone or things like that, but have a conversation where they're not having to fight will be life changing. Like I remember my first conversation with the Student Accessibility and Inclusion team here at university. My first phone call with them was very emotional and very life changing, all because they said, “Okay, what do you need? What can we get for you? You tell us what you need. We'll sort it out on our end. Don't worry about cost or what it is, you just say what things you have thought of that would make your life easier to be successful in this area.” And I had never heard that before. I had never had someone go, “You tell me first and then we will then know what we're dealing with, and then I can do what's my job and go from there.”

I've always had the, “Okay, this is what I can give you. This is all you're going to get. Are you happy with this or not?” Just flipping that equation will be a positive experience for that student and will suddenly mean that they're not on a defence and not expecting to fight, which means they may actually be able to more accurately communicate how you can support them, which is then (1) a lot more effective use of the time and a lot more effective use of any advice or kind of conversations that you can then have with the students. So that's probably the advice I would give. Yeah.

KYLIE: Can we say a big thank you? We have time for maybe one question in the room and one online. So I'm just conscious I'm standing between everyone and lunch now. So do we have a question in the room to start off with? Yep.

- I’d first like to say I'm very privileged to hear from you guys, just your strength and how empowering you feel, which is a remarkable. It really is. But also the privilege of seeing the work you've done. You know, this is going to help us enormously. It really will.

I'll go to my question now. How do we, as career practitioners, get that empowerment that it's taken you some time to get to now? How can we bring that earlier so we can actually get that kick-up earlier for our students?

AMY: It starts with the little steps, like what Taylor was saying. Allow your student to divulge to you, you know, go off what they give you. You don't know immediately what your student needs or how you can empower them. You just know you can. And so let your student come to you with where they're at and go from there. Listen, be open. Also listen for the downtrodden language that they might use that they're not even aware that they're using and be prepared to maybe pull them up on that a little bit. Don't be afraid. Just use your tools to empower them. I suppose it’s a very vague answer but, yeah, I don't know, come at it with understanding and empathy, rather than this feeling of “I have all the answers”, because nobody does. Yeah.

PENELOPE: Can I just add a little bit to what you were saying? I think one of the things I did - I mean, I know I'm older, but when I started university 2015, I kind of self-limited myself. I just assumed there were certain subjects I couldn't do or certain career paths I would never be able to do. But I didn't really have any information.

So I think to empower your high school students, if they're kind of -maybe take them right back to square one and say, “What would you really love to do in a perfect world?”, because there are lots of things you can do even if you're in a wheelchair or you have other disabilities. There are ways of doing other career paths that aren't obvious, that you don't see around you. Like for me, I'm doing a Bachelor of Science, and I just sort of self-limited myself and said, “Oh, well, I'll never be able to go into the outback in a four-wheel drive and do six months of fieldwork or whatever.” But nowadays, with the internet and with satellite technology and, you know, like there are so many things that people can do from home at their own pace.

So I think you need to encourage students to sort of think outside the box. It's not just what you see on like nature shows on TV, David Attenborough out in the mountains. Yeah, you know, there are lots of things behind the scenes, lots of research work, lots of background work that's really fascinating that you can do if you have a disability. And it's not second rate work. It's not like, “Oh, well, I'll just settle for being a research assistant. Oh, boo hoo.” It's actually quite fascinating because you're using your mind.

All the information is there now. There are global databases. You know, top scientists share their work. So you can be right in there giving really groundbreaking ideas. So I think, you know, ask your students, like don't self limit before you've investigated. You know, your disability is not a major limitation anymore with technology. So I think that's incredibly empowering.

KYLIE: I think as well on your question, I think universities have a stronger role here in working with schools in terms of how do we provide opportunities, experiences and outreach into schools specifically for students with disability and how do we create that seamless pathway into higher ed, not only higher ed, but TAFE and employment.

- We've done a fantastic job around mental health, right? But we haven't really hit that chestnut around disabilities, and both visual and non-visual. So I think it is something that's quite important.

KYLIE: It comes back to stigma again.

- Yeah.

TAYLOR: And I think just touching on that for my own experience, so I myself have a rare illness. So when I suddenly go into a doctor's office and say my illness, I'm fully expecting no-one to know what it is. But then suddenly if a doctor goes, “Oh yeah, I know what that is”, I'm like, “Oh, you know what that is?” So then that can then be transferred into if a student comes in and goes, “Hi, I know that there are some things that are available to me”, and you go, “I actually know what they are. Let me tell you what I already know”, the fact that, like, obviously we're here advertising this resource, but the fact that if you guys know what is available to the student, you’re going to be someone that can support them in ways they probably may not have been expecting.

So in terms of what you were asking about empowering, just the knowledge is power thing. You know, what support you can already give this student that they may never have heard of or never have known that this was available to them. That I feel like should empower you guys to know that may be the first time they've ever heard this information, or the first time they have ever actually known that they can be supported in the workforce or at university. So I think that, in itself, should be empowering for you guys of knowing the knowledge of that. So, yeah.

KYLIE: Do we have any questions from our online? No? Okay. Well, I think we might leave it there. This session has been recorded. It will be available on the ADCET website and all of the professional resources, not only from today, but also from across the week, will be made available to everyone. So you'll get those via email in the next couple of weeks.

For those of you who are tuning in online and those of you who are here face to face, we do have other sessions running across this week, if you head back to school and you want to tune in, and they'll be sessions specifically for neurodivergent students working with employers and how do we break down those barriers with employers as well and looking at students as partners and work experience type approach as well. So those are a few different sessions on this week.

But thank you so much for your time and just a huge thank you in particular to Michael and also Amy, Penelope and Taylor. Nuala and I have been so happy to work with you and just so proud of what the four of you have produced. Thank you so much.