PRESENTER: Welcome to this ADCET podcast, your gateway to the world of inclusive education in the post-secondary sector.

As part of ADCET’s long-running commitment to supporting Universal Design for Learning or UDL, we are running a special series of podcasts called UDL in Action, the what, why and how. In this podcast series we will be highlighting international approaches to UDL.

In this episode we will introduce you to Dara Ryder, Chief Executive Officer at AHEAD Ireland. Dara has worked for AHEAD for over 14 years in various roles and will share with us today his expertise about UDL as a means of supporting students and particular insights into the Irish experience of supporting students with a disability.

DARLENE McLENNAN: Welcome, everybody. We're fortunate today to have Dara Ryder, the CEO of AHEAD Ireland with us, very excited at ADCET to have a long-standing relationship and collaboration with AHEAD. Dara and his team have been really generous to us in sharing resources and practice and their time in sharing what they're doing with us.

So, it's great to be able to talk to Dara again. We did a podcast with him probably two or three years ago at the start of the pandemic. I encourage you all to go back and listen to that as well, but welcome, Dara. First, just for those who haven't kind of heard about AHEAD and the work you do, could you provide a little bit of an overview of AHEAD?

DARA RYDER: Thanks a million, Darlene, for having us on, it's great to speak again. I'm still slightly mystified that people have any interest in hearing what I have to say. I'm always delighted to get an invite, and it's always lovely to chat to you. We always end up when we're doing these recordings by the way for your listeners, we always end up having these endless chats before the recording starts and we have to remind ourselves that we only have a short window, so, thanks a million.

AHEAD is an organisation and it's an independent NGO set up to create inclusive environments in education and employment for people with disabilities, so we actually work mostly around access and participation in further and higher education and then supporting the transition on into graduate employment.

We've been around since the late 1980s, originally actually formed by students for students as a kind of peer support movement for students with disabilities in that time when there was very little in the way of legislation or policy to support access and over time I suppose through that work eventually became a national movement or a national body and eventually evolved into an NGO which supports both students directly but actually has a major, major role in supporting the sectors more broadly to be more inclusive.

I suppose we would have focused a lot in in our early period on support and the development of disability support services, supporting quality and good practice and, you know, the policy framework around that. Then over time we've been shifting our focus there, or broadening our focus I should say really, to include looking at the universal design context of participation right across the campus, so looking at everything from help in the classroom, but also the full student experience so looking at how students with disabilities engage in study abroad, how they engage in work placement, how they engage in clubs and societies, all of that kind of work. That has really quite a strong focus on the Universal Design message as well as supporting quality in the work of the disabilities and support services directly.

DARLENE McLENNAN: Thank you. This kind of focus of this series of podcasts is where we're looking at Universal Design for Learning. We're very fortunate to be in a position that we've received a small grant funding from our Australian government to support the implementation of the practice of UDL and build awareness and understanding across the higher education and VET sector which is exciting, so it allows us to kind of do podcasts. We're looking at having a master class and some seminars and webinars which is exciting and we're looking at kind of talking to people like you internationally around what's happening.

So, with the Universal Design for Learning approach that you're taking and the work you're doing in promoting universal design in Ireland, can you provide kind of a bit of an outline or overview of the work that you have done?

DARA RYDER: Yes, sure. I suppose it would have started like, you know we would see ourselves as kind of flag bearers for the universal design movement trying to first of all get people interested and then trying to educate the sector about it, trying to improve confidence in it as a framework by showing its evidence base, by sharing its evidence base and, you know, linking its quality, linking it to international best practice, so all that kind of work. I suppose we do it, we’re both in different kinds of ways, I would say take kind of a top down and bottom up approach.

We have a lot of advocacy work at the national level which we do by, you know, producing for example policy submissions to our government’s agencies and by engaging with national steering groups which AHEAD will be a member of, a lot of national policy steering groups, so being able to input our message so when policy is considered making sure a commitment to universal design and UDL kind of sits within those policies.

We’d also as well look to increase the evidence base ourselves so we’re constantly engaging with research and mostly with students with disabilities but also with practitioners as well of teaching and learning and looking at that side. When we do our work with students with disabilities we always have a UD angle if you like. We always have that piece around looking at their desires and needs in the classroom and how can they be translated from, I suppose, individual desires into mainstream practice.

That’s where there’s the top down sort of part of it and then from the bottom up part of it we’re doing a huge amount of capacity building through a range a different modes, so a lot of professional development and a lot of hosting, you know, big sort of community building events and a lot of producing of guidance, so national guidance documents as well.

That's kind of, I suppose, it in a brief nutshell. I would say if I had to give it a kind of core value and a stream to all of that work, it's about partnership, collaboration, community and really trying to facilitate the sector, take this onboard themselves and working with them in a collaborative spirit to try and push this forward.

DARLENE McLENNAN: Thinking about really why we're here and why we do this, it is really about the student, you know, it is about the student succeeding in that post secondary education space. I think for many of us that have kind of looked at Universal Design for Learning and how that can support and help the success of students with disability we can see the benefits, you know, very much in that practice.

We just want to kind of reflect on what are some of the main challenges do you think that students with disability face in the tertiary sector or the post-secondary education sector and what ways that UDL can address those challenges?

DARA RYDER: I think, and if it is okay I might even go broader than students with disabilities here first and even just looking at maybe the broader student profile and also looking at our staff because I think we need to think about this as a community rather than section this off.

I mean I think the demographics of higher education are just massively, massively changing as societies have changed so quickly as well more broadly and then the demands on our students and staff are really changing partly as a consequence of that, partly as a consequence of what are kind of environmental factors.

I’ll just give you a sense from Ireland, just give you a quick example of how quickly things are changing. In Ireland now we have about 23% of our students are not from what we would class as a white Irish ethnic background. I quote "white Irish". It's the language used in our census here which is then translated into our higher education statistics. In our AG population we know that 23% are not from that background. That's up from just 13% in 2015/16.

We’ve seen this really rapid change in the demographics there. In terms of students with disabilities we know from our own research at AHEAD here that in terms of engagement with disability support services that it's risen over 268% in the last 12 years. We now know almost 20% of the general population self disclose in anonymous surveys that they have disability. We're seeing this incredibly rapid shift in the demographics to look much more like our sort of general population than it perhaps has in the past and even on our end about 40% of our students enter higher education now through non-traditional entry routes.

That's just to give you a sense of the changing population and that means also that the demands on our population are changing. Now they have more financial demands, those demands are caused by disability, they are caused by the increased housing crisis that we have here in Ireland but I know that's echoed in many places all over the world.

Employment for example is a huge issue in terms of most of our students now are, I think in Ireland it's about 56% of our higher education population have to work while they're in higher education and of those students the average is about 17 hours a week on top of what they have to do anyway. They have more time demands in terms of caring, in terms of longer commutes, they have more health demands as we increase the disability profile. We have people who have to manage their health much more carefully, so we have this wildly different user base in front of us, all sorts of increased pressures and that's really the same for our staff. We know that the staff workloads are increasing on people and equally the diversity in our staff profile is increasing.

All of these pressures are happening, all these new dynamics in the sector, you know, in the system and yet how much can we honestly say has fundamentally shifted in how we design and deliver our programs, have our approaches to curriculum design, to assessments and maybe even to the times and places and modes that we deliver our education radically changed over that time and how our notions of rigor and integrity shifted to kind of look at these changing dynamics and meet them where we're at. It kind of begs the question are we actually teaching for the reality of the situation that's there in front of us, I'd argue really not.

I think we know that challenge is essential to learning, you know. The research tells us that we need to grapple with ideas, to struggle with them, to overcome them, that's fundamental to growth and learning, but I would argue that the fact that we haven't done the hard work of fundamentally re-examining those practices in later days can changing dynamics means that all our students and our staff are actually facing a lot of, and I'm going to steal a phrase here from CAST's Nicole Tucker-Smith, who I absolutely love her work, she said, that a lot of our staff and our students are facing unproductive struggle. It's actually struggle that doesn't help us in the learning process whatsoever. I think that's where UDL really steps in to help us to address it. UDL can help us to address the fundamental barriers in the way we design and deliver our learning that cause us to unproductively struggle.

DARLENE McLENNAN: It's a great way of actually framing it, I think, and just from my memories of going into an online module and the structure is just, you know, you become overwhelmed and you just want to close your computer down again because it’s too hard.

DARA RYDER: When you're fighting with technology to try and get where you need to go that's an unproductive struggle. We all feel a level of that, you know, in our experiences as learners, but we know that our disadvantaged learners really experience that to the extreme. For some learners we might get the frustration of not being able to find the resources we need on our learning management system, for a student with a disability who’s using screen reader what they’re talking about they struggle to find the resource and when they get there they can’t read it. There are different layers of this kind of unproductive struggle.

DARLENE McLENNAN: AHEAD has been working in the UDL space and supporting UDL across Ireland for a number of years now. What do you think are some of the key factors that contribute to the success of the implementation of UDL in the tertiary sector. We’re looking for learnings here I suppose.

DARA RYDER: I think community is one of the biggest factors for me. If we could build community around the subject, around the topic and a community that’s welcoming, kind, caring and sharing it all sounds a bit fluffy doesn’t it but I mean it because I think that’s actually essential to getting the whole thing going and giving it momentum.

I mentioned before working at the top down bottom up and trying to connect those two dots, that’s true but I don’t think you ever really get the top down part of it if you don’t have the bottom up sort of bubbling under the surface. In a way it tends to be in my experience the bottom up that causes the top down to happen eventually. There’s usually a kind of staggered piece in there. I would say building community is actually essential so when you’re thinking about how to kind of support UDL implementation communities of practice, institutional level and national level bringing people together to share and recognize each other’s work.

Trying to create that kind of open source culture around the materials people are creating and developing trying to get a culture of people lifting each other up and sharing each other’s practices and recognized on a national stage that’s been really helpful for us. Any time we’re designing our projects and our work we’re always thinking about that piece all the way through, how can we get more people involved in collaborative development of the work and how can we actually share the load in terms of spreading the good word about it and the implementation of it.

I’m going to talk a little bit about how we do that later on. Ultimately, resources are a very important part of this. Sometimes I think it’s a little bit ñ people think oh, we need all this incredible new money to support UDL implementation.  Sometimes I think it’s more about that we haven’t had the bravery to make the shift about where our resources are spent. We’re still investing this incredible infrastructure in providing individualized support for every single learner that is disadvantaged of any kind. We sort of use the sticking plasters all over the place to try and address the issues that are actually systemic and fundamental in nature.

I think sometimes we have to have the bravery to step back at a very senior level and say where does the resource shift need to happen. Can we provide more resources to address the value of the source or trying to pull up the ladder ñ sticking plaster at a later stage, so it’s kind of rather than incredible energy resources and financial and people resources that we put into the retroactive measures. Do we have the bravery to shift up a little bit of that towards proactive measures. You do need that kind of senior support as well to make that sustainable change and the senior buy in and a little bit of bravery on a national and institutional level to make that happen.

I’d say student engagement is also a really kind of important piece in all this, so when we look at our implementation structures that we’re building to support implementation that you make sure that we have strong student involvement in that. I think that’s really, really crucial and that’s usually a factor in the institutions I’ve seen do this very well. They’re making a concerted effort to involve the users of the higher education system in its design in the first place. They’d be some of the key ones there, the key ones that come to mind.

In terms of where money is spent that’s often a question I get asked. We have this about money, where should we spend it. For me if you’re going to spend it in one place it’s in structural design support for our academics and our educators and actually giving them time, buying out time to actually help them to do this work.

I imagine that all these changing pressures and all the pressure on academics is increasing. Sometimes there could be a bit of fall guy in the UDL debating our academics had a problem. They don’t say it’s their responsibility to teach everybody and they’re not doing their jobs, but we have to recognize the realities that they’re facing as well and because of these increased dynamics their role is changing. We’re actually asking them to do things and that has to be recognized in their workloads and also in the structural design support that we provide them with from the outset.

DARLENE McLENNAN: Thank you. There are some great ideas. I love the idea of bravery. We are probably in that list of things our community - we’re trying to build a community and we’ve got a fabulous community of practice which I’ll put in some links at the end of the podcast for people to link to our community of practice. Also in that we’re actually hearing about community of practice at an institutional level as well which has enabled us to see if people are taking it on as one of their roles in their institution to actually develop and facilitate a community of practice.

DARA RYDER: I think that in terms of the implementation thing, I think it’s really important as well to consider in that community piece in terms of whatever structures you’re looking at for implementation within an institution you need to remember that UDL doesn’t live in a bubble. It lives in the broader context of universal design on a campus so there’s no point in an educator doing this incredible innovative practice if he's sitting in a tiered lecture theatre and he has a very fixed timetable. He has no influence over how it all happens and how he wants to teach. It is a little broader than that. There needs to be a broader picture of what universal design and the physical environment looks like and the digital environment looks like in the design of our support service and be flexible and if it’s accessible enough for students to get what they need.

I think our implementation structures and our community building activity needs to think about that and include the wider scope of the university in those conversations. We had a little chat I think beforehand about disability practitioners, their role and their engagement in the UDL process and how do we engage.

Actually to me there’s a critical relationship that has to happen there between disability and disability support officers and our academics in terms of is there a really strong understanding that the practice in those two zones is very, very linked. When we see our academics actually embedding more universal design practice the pressures on our disability support services is in terms of those retroactive accommodations and that gives them the scope and the space to work towards the students with higher needs who need more individualized accommodation. That’s really where their focus is, their expertise is given the most value. I think that kind of broader picture and looking at it in the wider scope is really important.

DARLENE McLENNAN: We’ve looked at the success factors or some suggestions on how to ensure success but also what are some of the common misconceptions or barriers that you’ve seen or have come against when you’re trying to implement or support UDL uptake in Ireland?

DARA RYDER: I mean like some of the things you in the initial phase, actually we just referenced there the piece around the disability practitioners, in the initial phase AHEAD worked mostly with the disability practitioners and examined this at the before stage because we kind of recognized that there was a lot of push back from those quarters because there was a sense of like does this mean that there’s no need for disability practitioners any more you know, in this sense of what’s this going to do to my role. I think that’s a very big myth that there is no need for disability coordinators in the universal design campus which is just complete rubbish and these things sit alongside each other. We will never be able to proactively design out all the barriers that learners experience.

What we need to do is free up our disability coordinators and to use their expertise where it’s most valued and that’s to help the students who have the biggest needs. That’s a big one. Another big myth is actually that UDL is for students with disabilities. It’s not. I mean it’s kind of a continuum of need that have people have and we all have different learning needs, we all experience learning barriers as individuals and I suppose what UDL helps us deal with is the design for the edges of our classroom so that everybody can benefit from the flexibility and choice that those at the edges have.

If we think about the kind of reasonable accommodations that we might provide for one individual, well actually how can we design it so those accommodations have got flexibility for users baked in so everybody experiences the benefit from the craft and the labour of having to produce that work in the first place, so it’s kind of just shifting the focus of where we place our work and our efforts to make sure that everybody can benefit from that.

I think some from the individual level, things like UDL can only be implemented at the program design stage. People think this is like I have to overhaul everything, throw my class completely up in the air. UDL like any design process can be a iterative process so I encourage any practitioners who are keen to jump into this very much to start small.

Thomas Tobin from the United States has a really good model for this which is called the Plus 1 approach. He recommends that when you’re going to start your UDL implementation start with what he would class as road blocks to learning ,those points where maybe you get 100 emails from your students about a particular subject matter or maybe a particular assessment. That’s kind of telling you something when you get that. That’s telling you there’s a road block happening there and that’s a really good place to start it at, UDL implementation maybe just by providing one more option for learners to engage with the material, they have to understand the material, able to express themselves around the material. We can do that very iteratively. We don’t throw everything up in the air and actually usually what happens is when people try to do that they fail spectacularly and it actually results in very negative consequences in the long term and a negative view of UDL over the long term.

What I see very regularly with educators is that the idea to do good UDL in inverted commas you need to be tech savvy, so a lot of educators who may be aren’t that comfortable in the technology zone, almost stand back from it straightaway because the see this kind of closer link between UDL and technology use. There’s no doubt about it technology is a very powerful tool in UDL if used correctly but it’s only tool of a whole suite. UDL can be done very effectively in high tech, low tech or no tech zones. You can do no tech UDL that doesn’t involve anything about it really, it’s about giving choice and options and sometimes that choice can be paper, different paper choices, different ways of expressing themselves in the classroom that having nothing to do with technology and sometimes they can and give high tech approaches. They’re just some of the common misconceptions you see at the practitioner level around implementation.

DARLENE McLENNAN: I’ll take this opportunity to do a plug here. For those who don’t know we actually have an elearning resource around Universal Design for Learning and the link will be in the show notes. In that we actually have Thomas present a video on the One Plus idea and when you complete the training we encourage people to pledge One Plus, have a think about what they could do, that One Plus thing to change their practice. We put them on our website and people can put up anonymous and go into our content around Universal Design on our website. You can see the One Pluses that people have pledged to undertake after they’ve done their course.

DARA RYDER: Congratulations on that, Darlene. I know you’ve had five minutes engagement with that course and for such a short period of time that’s been implemented it’s really impressive so well done on that.

DARLENE McLENNAN: Thank you. It couldn’t happen without the collegiality of our international staff in this space as well, so it’s been very good to help us build those relationships. It’s great.

There has been kind of a lot of implementation and supporting of the UDL. Have you seen the attitudes and practice change within Ireland around UDL, people grabbing hold of it, utilizing it.

DARA RYDER: Massively, like massive, massive change in Ireland. I don’t want to pretend. If you were to take a random classroom and walk into it that you’re going to see this fabulous UDL practice everywhere you go it’s not necessarily at that point yet but what we’re seeing is incredible engagement in professional development.

AHEAD for example has a UDL badge programs which we developed in collaboration with University College Dublin and it’s issued to our national firm for enhancement for teaching and learning. That’s a 10 week 25 hour badge. More than 3000 educators in Ireland now have taken that badge in the last number of years. We’ve seen this incredible engagement. Ireland is only a small country so 3000 is quite a lot of our practitioners across education.

We’re seeing just incredible engagement in institutional projects and much more dialogue in Ireland. There were three national UDL conferences already this year, so for a small country of four or five million people it’s really taken off as a concept. It’s in the conversation to a much greater degree than it was. I think we have a really strong base of people who are really invested in the idea and who are not just practising UDL in their teaching practice but also have become advocates and leaders for it at an institutional level so that’s really brought it up massively in the conversation.

I can also say as well that’s really affecting the work of bodies like AHEAD as well, the fact of what’s happening in the policy conversation as a result of that. We have seen really strong changes in terms of the policy framework around Universal Design more broadly in further education and higher education, so for example the commitment to Universal Design is baked into our further education training strategy. That’s the main strategy and we’re also seeing in the national plan for equity of access to higher education plays specific goals around the adoption of UDL. That’s a new strategy that was launched last year so that’s led to all sorts of really interesting movements for example last year we had a Universal Design fund launch in a higher education setting which was a specific funding stream to support institutional projects and to develop Universal Design practice and that’s a force here in Ireland.

I think there’s a really positive momentum towards that. Interestingly in the conversation that leads to a different type of conversation because we’re getting also much more critical analysis of it as it becomes part of our everyday conversation. There’s a lot of people saying, Hold on a minute, why are we doing this thing? which I actually really welcome. I think it’s a really healthy positive debate that we have to have, so I really welcome that piece as well and a good example of that is that we have AHEAD is partnering with the All Ireland Journal for Teaching and Learning to do a special issue on Universal Design in tertiary education which is going to be released next year, so we’ll be really looking at reviews, empirical evidence to support this work or to analyse this work. I think that’s another welcome development which is kind of part the evolution of this work.

DARLENE McLENNAN: It’s wonderful to see that evolution. We had a webinar yesterday and there was hot debate around the evidence. It was just a great conversation. I’ve seen people’s willingness to engage and have robust conversations around UDL, it’s growing, it’s great, I think. It’s really good to be critical in everything we do and actually to think about it or critique it, not necessarily be critical but critique what we’re doing to ensure that we’re doing the best we possibly can.

One of the questions we had was the lessons learned from Ireland and you’ve kind of shared so much of this and I’m already seeing memes come of this Dara, the key things that you’ve said to us, GIFs probably more, what you’ve said, it’s so succinct and so beautiful but for us it’s really about learning from you. What are some of the lessons that Ireland has learnt to pass on to the audience of Australia but even internationally, like what are you seeing and experiencing that you could pass on, that wisdom and mantle to others on this journey.

DARA RYDER: First of all, definitely having different pathways into Universal Design practice is really, really valuable. We have the UDL badge here in Ireland. It’s brilliant to model because it’s delivered in partnership with the sector. It’s a train the trainer model so it’s totally open source and free but as well as doing the badge you can also become a badge facilitator and then once a year we roll out the course nationally with all of those facilitators and institutions all around the country, so it’s this kind of model where you’re building community and you’re giving people on the ground an opportunity to take a leadership role that’s not too heavy in terms of their time in engagement but also enables them to create local community in the process.

So creating lots of ways in the community like the heart of it is really important and I mentioned that was a 25 hour 10 week badge. We also have like a much more scaled down ways into it as well. We have for example our ARK ecosystem which is a whole ecosystem of two hour short courses that are all related. They’re not all fully UDL focused but they’re related to digital accessibility and Universal Design practice more broadly. You can take a two-hour UDL course for example. Having these kind of different ways in is really important and recognizing people’s level of engagement will be different where they’re at.

I’d say from an international perspective in terms of systemic implementation one of the things that we discovered most recently, we did a piece of research last year, myself and my colleague Dr Richard Healy and a colleague from Trinity College, Dublin, Dr John Banks produced a book chapter for the international handbook on disability in higher education looking at the policy and practice here in Ireland and where the gaps may exist.

As part of that work we looked at all the professional development that we kind of talked about. It was ongoing at the sort of ground level in the practice that was going on with individuals and we looked at the policy framework which in Ireland is actually very strong now and very robust. We also looked at the strategic plans of all of our institutions and we looked at what I call performance agreements here which are agreements between the institutions and the State in terms of how they make their own performance matrix.

What we found actually there’s a bit missing at the leadership levels of our institutions, strategic vision isn’t making specific reference to Universal Design and UDL so I think that’s an area that I suppose perhaps surprised us a little because of all the dialogue and all the talk but it’s certainly an area of focus for us. It’s something that we’re looking at next. I’d say when you’re looking at implementation recognize that there’s three kind of major levels that it needs to occur on to a national level, an institutional strategic level and it’s the individual on the ground, so trying to make a strategy and frame it around that would be really, really important.

DARLENE McLENNAN: I’m getting inspired. I was inspired beforehand. Before we started recording I said the challenge of meeting with Dara I come away with 100 other ideas, 100 other jobs to do afterwards. It’s always fabulous to hear what you’re doing.

I feel like I’ve taken a lot of your time so I just kind of want to probably just ask is there anything else that you wanted to kind of share, any resources that you kind of wanted to highlight.

DARA RYDER: I can think of some open source resources we have. First of all I did ARK our Self Directed Short Courses ranging on different types of digital accessibility on UDL practice, so if any of your educators are interested in dropping into those feel free to do so. In Ireland our further education and training sector we’ve done a lot of work with those and we have a specific UDL resource hub for that so we have National Guidance which actually now we’re really pleased to say it’s included in the forming parameters for further education training institutions and evidence supporting the implementation of that. We have the guidance document itself which is around individual practice and we also have lots of case studies, video case studies, we have refracted templates and you can get that at ahead.ie/udlforfet. Maybe I’d recommend checking that out as a starting point.

DARLENE McLENNAN: That’s brilliant. I’m a frequent user of your website. I find it invaluable. We’ll certainly put the link in the show notes to all that information as well. Just in finishing and I know you’ve said this throughout probably but I suppose I just want to capture that at the end is what is your recommendation for tertiary education, institutions and policy makers who are interested in implementing UDL but are unsure of where to start or how to overcome potential barriers.

DRA RYDER: If they’re at the early stages of implementation or national level I would recommend policy makers form a community. That is great dedicated forming streams for institutions to explore this practice and make it a criteria of performing mechanisms. Communities of practice are a national collaboration feature within those pieces. We don’t have institutions going off and doing lots of projects in a silo, in their own pieces but at an institutional level I would kind of reiterate that point I made earlier that UDL does not live in a bubble, the implementation structure is the structure that you have to support in contemplation at the individual level needs to include people from right across the campus and it needs to include both staff and students. We need to recognize the sort of links between what happens in the disability office or the student support office and what happens in the classroom. We need to think about the wider context of universal design. If students can’t get into a room in the first place then they can’t enjoy the UDL practice that’s happening so we need to kind of think about the connections between all these things.

I suppose for people who are advocating for that change I think we need to be really bold about the unsustainability of what is happening. Higher education is coming to a sort of a breaking point in terms of these changing demographics and the lack of response, the lack of fundamental response. There’s a lot of work going on, we know that but are we fundamentally shifting what we’re doing in response to it, like do our programs really look dramatically different than they did 20 years ago. Yes, they look different we know that but do they actually fundamentally change in terms of the way we deliver our pedagogy, we way we think about rigor and quality within those systems.

I think it probably needs to be pushing that message all the time and bringing the evidence to bear on that message showing that Universal Design is a frame that will allow us to address this to critically reflect on this and analyse the stuff in their progress. Really this is about sustainability. We talk a lot about UN sustainable development goals here in Ireland. I’m not sure if you have the same out there in Australia but this is a massive sustainability issue and I always think about the frog being boiled in a kettle. If you put a frog into boiling water it will jump straight out.

Well, what’s happened over time is you’ve dropped the frog into water and you’ve thrown up the heat and actually the frog will just die if we don’t do something quick. I don’t think we’re fundamentally tuned into how much pressure is coming into the system in all these different areas but I think we’re seeing it, you know, expressed almost at an individual level, there’s some frustration at an individual level. We need to change that frustration into energy to actually change our fundamental practice.

DARLENE McLENNAN: That was a great last question because it was a fabulous last answer. Thank you so much. I think that captures it all, so really appreciate your time. I’m sure the audience is going to get so much out of this and if I was walking and listening to this I’d be wanting to stop and write down some of the quotes and things you’re saying but we do transcribe so people can come back to it. Thank you, Dara, for your time. Thank you to AHEAD for being so generous with your resources and knowledge. We have this international partnership. It really benefits us and all the staff around the country and all the students. Thank you.

DARA RYDER: Thank you to you Darlene. It’s been great to be able to learn from Australian colleagues like yourself and others as well. Keep up the good work and keep fighting the good fight.

PRESENTER: Thanks for listening to our UDL podcast series, UDL in Action, the what, why and how. You can find out more about Universal Design for Learning by visiting our website at adcet.edu.au/udl. Thanks for listening.