INTRO:

Hello everyone and thanks for listening to this ADCET podcast. This episode is an audio recap of a recent ADCET webinar Building Host organization capacity to provide safe and equitable work integrated Learning for students with disability. Presented by Associate Professor Tanya Lawlis and Thomas Bevitt from the University of Canberra, this webinar presented some of the findings from their The Australian Collaborative Education Network funded Equitable WIL project.

TANYA: Thanks so much, Gabrielle, and thanks very much for ADCET for having us here today and for everybody turning up and listening to our presentation today. So as Gabrielle mentioned, we are going to present the work that we had done ‑ or some of the work that we have completed on our project about building host organisation capacity to provide safe and equitable work integrated learning for students with disability.

Tom and I are going to be presenting on behalf of the research team. As you can see on this slide, the team comprised members from both the University of Canberra and Edith Cowan University, and also included a mix of academic staff and staff who worked in the inclusion areas within the universities.

Just a bit about me, I'm the Associate Dean Education and Strategy at the University of Canberra, but over the last five years I've worked in the WIL space. More particularly, I created a work integrated learning program for health students enrolled in non‑clinical health degrees. That's somebody who does undergrad nutrition, health science or psychology. I'm just going to hand you over to Tom so Tom can introduce himself as well.

THOMAS: Good morning, everybody. My name is Tom. I am a white Caucasian male with my pronouns are he/him. I'm currently sitting in my office wearing a black jumper and some black round glasses. I have brown hair and my background screen is blurred so you can't see the chaos in my office.

So I am an occupational therapist, professional practice convenor, and my role is to support both the students and the professional educators to host placements. In our program we have about 1,000 hours of work integrated learning across a four‑year program or a two‑year program. I've also worked with a multi‑disciplinary team here at the University of Canberra to help establish a lot of their work integrated learning programs across the allied health disciplines, and I'm also completing a PhD at the moment, which is exploring getting experts by experience that consumers during our work integrated learning experiences to provide feedback to our students for learning. But I will talk about that another day.

So I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the lands where we're presenting from today, which is the Ngunnawal people, and also the Noongar people near Perth where Edith Cowan is located. I would like to pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. And I would also like to acknowledge that we are presenting today in NAIDOC Week, which I think is wonderful because it's all about talking about the success and the celebrations of the First Nations people. We had a workshop yesterday on that and it was highlighted that we should be celebrating NAIDOC Week every day. So that's something that I'm going to take moving forward, is to move NAIDOC Week into an everyday experience.

So why we did this project was Tanya and I had quite a few discussions about our students' experiences on WIL, and what we found in our hallway discussion was that we were having really similar experiences where students with disabilities were having some pretty poor experiences during their work integrated learning opportunities, and Tanya and I wanted to know why. And then the next question was: how do we then support the students ‑ well, how do we then support industry. And I think that was a key part that Tanya and I really wanted to drive and push because we feel that a lot of pressure and a lot of expectations are placed on the student to identify, to proactively seek out support, and to do the hard work, yet our thinking and our thought was, well, what's industry doing and what is the university doing to support students with disability to access their education and access the work integrated learning space?

So Tanya very kindly opted to lead this project which was really exciting. And we applied for a grant through a network called ACEN, which is the Australian Collaborative Education Network, and they focus a lot on the work integrated learning space. So we received a $10,000 grant to do a research study and to develop up some resources to help industry prepare for hosting students with a disability on a work integrated learning experience. Tanya, did you have anything else to add to that?

TANYA: No I think you covered it quite well thanks Tom. Tom just spoke about why we chose to do this study, and then we will go into a little bit of a background, very brief sort of background, because we want to focus more on the project that we did. So we will talk about our project aims, and just describe the design of the project so you get a sense of the breadth of work that we did over ‑ it was probably 12 to 18 months that we did this study. And then we will focus on some project findings, particularly around the host organisation component of the study and our scoping review. And we really want to focus on the resources that we developed as a result of the study. And we're pretty proud, I think. We really like the resources that we've got there. And then we've got plenty of opportunity for questions. As Gabrielle said at the beginning, that if you have got questions, then you can put them in the chat and we will answer them at the end.

So just starting with the background, we know from recent literature and published data that there has been an increase in students with disability enrolling in higher education institutions, particularly when we compare that to total enrolments. You know, in 2014, there was 5.5% of total enrolment were students with disability compared to total enrolments and that increased to 7.4% in 2020. We have to note, though, that this is really ‑ this data includes students who have disclosed their disability at the time of enrolling, or possibly some time during their degree, and we know a lot of students don't disclose. So the number of students who are now enrolling in higher education degree programs is actually much higher than that, than the figures that are represented here on the screen.

We also know, from the graduate outcomes survey data ‑ and the graduate outcomes survey is a survey that students or graduates from degrees are asked to do six months post graduation. This data showed that 7.1% of students with a disability who have graduated are more likely to be unemployed, and that 3.4% of students with disability who have graduated are more likely to be employed in work that does not match their skill set.

What the literature also tells us is that a WIL experience ‑ so a WIL being a work integrated learning experience ‑ and work integrated learning can cover a placement, a field trip, internship, can cover simulation, but we didn't include simulation in this study ‑ so having an experience, placement or internship within a degree can actually improve a student's employability skills and their readiness for the work environment. We know a lot of programs don't include a work integrated learning experience in their degree and it's something that higher education institutions are starting to embed across all their degrees. I know here at UC, there is the aim for all undergraduate programs to include a WIL experience. So by having this WIL experience in the degree we are hoping that those students can actually be employed or better employed in work that does match their actual skill set.

What we also know from the literature, though, and from our own experiences that Tom, you know, described earlier, that students with disability have a poorer WIL experience than students without a disability. And that was really ‑ I think became more evident when you say, Tom, through the scoping review that we did, and we will talk about that a little bit in a few slides' time.

When you are developing WIL as a higher education institution, and we are developing WIL, there are some legislation and things that we need to consider, but that are not always considered. The first one is ‑ most of you will know about the Disability Discrimination Act, and you know that the Disability Discrimination Act defines disability quite broadly, and according to the Act it encompasses physical, mental, sensory and intellectual impairment. We use this definition as a reference point within our project because we knew that universities and ‑ this was the basis of some of their policies and procedures. So that's why we sort of based our project on that. The DDA also states that "students with disability must be offered the same educational opportunities as everyone else", and that it states, among a whole lot of other things, that "a person with a disability does not have to disclose their disability or condition". And I know that most of you already know that but we just are highlighting those things because they are key when we come to the findings of our study.

Taking that a bit further, higher education institution needs to also be aware of the Disability Standards For Education. And this particular legislation clarifies the roles or requirements that a higher education institution must follow under the DDA. And it seeks to ensure students with disability can access and participate in education on the same basis as those without a disability. So in that document, the Disability Standards For Education, there are other ‑ so higher education institutions can implement the correct policies and procedures, there is information in there around a whole lot of things. And there is a couple we want to highlight is about the reasonable adjustments, and legal requirements relating to discrimination. So, you know, what is a reasonable adjustment, what can be included as a reasonable adjustment.

Other things that we need to consider are university policies and procedures. So I'm not sure how many of you here are from a university and whether you've actually looked at your university policies and procedures, particularly relating to WIL and disability, and what sort of information they use and the language that they use in these documents. As part of our project, we actually conducted a desktop review of the publicly available WIL policies and procedures. So we ended up reviewing 38 university websites of which ‑ well, 38 university websites were searched. 29 of those had publicly available WIL policies and/or procedures. So we were looking at it as if we're a student wanting to go to a university and we're wanting to understand what the policies and procedures were around WIL at that university.

When we reviewed each of the documents from those 29 university websites, 9 of those made no mention of disability in those WIL policies or procedures. And of the 20 that did, they mostly provided a general acknowledgement of students with disability. So there wasn't a huge explanation, there wasn't a lot of information, and they talked briefly about reasonable accommodations. 5 of the 20 that referred to students with disability they only provided links to the university disability policy, procedures or guidelines. Only 4 of them defined disability with 3 referring to the definition of the DDA.

So in that review, what we actually saw is that there was a lot of information missing around providing WIL opportunities for students with disability. And it's actually these documents that inform and the processes we have to follow when we're implementing WIL across the university.

So when we then go back to the Disability Standards For Education, knowing what we found in that desktop audit, that the disability ‑ that review done in 2020 actually highlighted that educational providers require further guidance to ensure equity and access to WIL. That was really highlighted through that desktop audit that we'd actually done.

When we're talking about WIL, to have a successful WIL requires collaboration and a stable relationship between three key stakeholders. That is the host organisation, the higher education institution, and the students themselves. So it has to ensure that all talk to each other or understand the process and the expectations during that WIL process. Now, the importance of that stakeholder relationship has been highlighted in three key WIL documents. The first is the 2008 WIL Report that states, "Stakeholders consider ensuring equitable participation and access by all students by collaboratively developing WIL funding structures, policies and strategic approaches."

The 2015 National WIL Strategy took this a little further and highlighted strategic leadership approaches that were needed, and there was a need for building capacity through support for employers and supervisors in that WIL process. And more recently, the 2019 WIL Quality Framework includes in one of the four domains stakeholder engagement. In that domain it highlights the importance of stakeholder partnerships in a design and strategic approach to WIL, and the quality of the WIL experience, but it still does not specifically mention anything about students with disability in WIL.

So while we have these documents from 2008, and while we have that legislation from 1992, we know that host organisations, as part of this tripartite relationship, are really not included in those collaborations. We know that from the literature, from the scoping review we did, but also from what Tom mentioned before. We know that the host organisations ‑ and we don't mean to, but we have not adequately included them in those discussions. So that then led us to our project and the aims of our project.

THOMAS: So what we set out to achieve was to really investigate the host organisation's experience and understanding what they are doing to prepare for hosting students with a disability, or if they haven't hosted a student with a disability, what are some of the things that they would like to see or like to experience so that they have the confidence and the courage to offer a placement site for a student with a disability. And following up from understanding those experiences, we then wanted to develop a series of resources that would then help the industry and the universities prepare for hosting a WIL experience for a student.

The way we went about that was through a three‑component stepped approach. As Tanya just provided an overview for, we did a desktop review. We also completed a scoping review and the scoping review is a broadbrush review of current published literature that kind of unpacks the current themes and the areas of research that have happened within a particular space. It doesn't necessarily examine the quality of the research, but talks a little bit more about what currently research is talking about.

We then did a second component where we completed an online survey of host organisations, both at the University of Canberra and Edith Cowan University. And we asked people to talk about their experiences and answer an online survey. All of the participants who completed the online survey were asked to participate in a focus group. We were quite excited to see we had 28 organisations answer the survey, and of those 28, 20 completed a focus group.

We also did a series of interviews with students with a disability both at Edith Cowan and the University of Canberra, which was semi‑structured single interviews to talk about their experience of being a student with a disability and their WIL experience. Those students were students that have completed a work integrated learning experience, so we wanted to understand their experiences and their stories. We have a few quotes to talk about that today but we don't have enough time to talk a lot more about that result. There is some amazing findings in that study that need a whole hour to itself.

What we wanted to flag with you is we did want to understand that tripartisan experience to understand everyone's experience to develop the resources. We then used principles of co‑design to co‑develop some of those resources we will outline today. We did pilot those resources with the host organisations to see how they fit within their organisations, and then we published them and put them online.

We will briefly go over the scoping review. So the literature highlighted that most research at the moment still talks about a deficit‑based approach for work integrated learning and students with disability. And that's a key thing that we keep ‑ that we found in our whole overview is we need to really shift our thinking to a strengths‑based approach. There is lots of calls to action within Australia and both internationally to embed WIL within the higher education. However, very little has changed over the last 15 years. The research hasn't really progressed further than that deficit‑based model. We are still seeing lots of challenges within organisation and professional beliefs and behaviours towards disability, we are seeing problems with organisational culture, and this concept that Tanya has already talked about, which will probably be a robust discussion at the end, is this need to disclose and what is it that students actually really need to disclose.

We're seeing still themes around students feeling unsafe or stigmatised when they do disclose and the fear that the students will not be treated the same if they do disclose. That crime of low expectation is still very, very prevalent within the literature and the student voice. Move on.

TANYA: Thanks, Tom. We will now have a little bit of a look at the host organisation key findings. And as Tom stated earlier, the host organisations or a representative from the host organisations completed the survey prior to the focus discussions. And we had 28 host organisations complete the survey. Of those, 14 had hosted a student with a disability on WIL, and half of those ‑ so 7 ‑ stated the student openly disclosed their disability and they had implemented reasonable accommodations for that particular student. All of the host organisations, regardless of whether they hosted a student with a disability or not, wanted to know more about student accommodations prior to the student commencing the WIL. So they needed to have that information right upfront. 26 of the 28 host organisations didn't know of any legislation or rules specific to hosting students with a disability, and none of those 28 host organisations knew about our university policies or procedures. So there is a couple of gaps that were just identified there in our survey.

We then took those findings to, while we had some set questions but we also used some of those findings to further explore in the focus groups. And as Tom mentioned, 20 of the host organisations were represented in those focus groups. And unlike the scoping review, which sort of ‑ as you are reading the papers, were really quite negative about hosting students with disability on WIL, those who participated in the focus groups were actually really positive and they were really keen to learn and know more about hosting students and what they can do to make students with disability feel safe and inclusive when they come on a WIL experience.

So I guess for us it was a really nice change to have that positivity in those discussions. You know, I guess we do have to hear that it may be just those organisations who really wanted to improve what they do in their organisations that participated. We won't really know, I guess, that but that can be a limitation here.

So when we analysed the focus group discussions, we came up with sort of four themes. And the first one I'm going to start with is that perceived need for students to disclose. This was really strong throughout the focus groups, and really took up a lot of the focus group time, and despite organisation, like the representatives, they acknowledged that students don't need to disclose their disability, but they felt they could not provide a positive and inclusive WIL experience without knowing about the student's disability and/or the accommodations that student needed, so they really, really wanted that upfront. And this seemed to create a tension within the host organisations between that wanting and needing to know about sort of the label and, you know, what the student ‑ that sort of information about that disability versus not wanting to break the confidence either. So that came through really, really strongly to us. And it was for them about knowing the what and the why. And they felt they could not provide, as I said before, any experience without knowing that information.

They did state, though, and acknowledged that the student should not be singled out or treated differently to their disability. So you could see these tensions as they were speaking. We then look at some of the ‑ a couple of others ‑ I should mention this, though ‑ stated that all students, that when we have students on WIL, every single student needs support on WIL. So we should be looking at a more strengths‑based or a more positive approach to having students on WIL and using the same approach to finding out what students need. And we sort of used that as a basis for our resources, which Tom will talk about in a little while.

One of the other themes is about the students' needs. And this, from the host organisation perception, was more focused on how the students viewed themselves and how the host organisations can use that view to help the student understand how disclosure can help them and what they could put in place while the students were on WIL. So there was a lot ‑ you can see that really closely relates to that perceived need to disclose, but it really sort of stood out.

The other two themes were the limited capacity that host organisations had, not only in terms of their knowledge and understanding around disability and accommodations, and how to apply or how to put in place accommodations, but it's also about the logistical challenges that they saw as barriers to hosting a student with a disability on WIL. And, you know, many of the organisations had ‑ you know, they were in offices that were old, there were limited space, they were on the second floor, and it just ‑ they could not see a way around hosting a student with disability at any point.

So host organisations also stated they didn't have the financial means to make changes to the building or buy specialised equipment. And the last thing was the university responsibilities. And this is where they felt that the universities provided really good support but they wanted to be more involved in the process, and involved in the process from the beginning of the WIL process. So before the actual placement or internship starts. So it's about having those pre‑WIL meetings with the host organisations between, you know, with the student and the host organisations; sharing the policies and procedures; and helping host organisations understand the policies and procedures, and expectations.

And really key, the host organisations wanted information on where to go if a student is struggling, or if they themselves are struggling to help support the student. Generally it was about improving communication overall. So that's what they really wanted the university to do.

Now, there is a couple of quotes that came out that were really key, and I will just read those quotes out. From one of the organisations they said, "The biggest hurdle we have at the moment is we don't have wheelchair accessible toilets. We have gender neutral toilets and we have private accessible spaces. We have a wheelchair accessible toilet in the building next to us. But in terms of offering someone an adequate solution, it's just not really reasonable to expect them to go out of the building, down the road, around the corner with the special key to go to the toilet." And that was one of the challenges they felt.

Another host organisation representative in terms of the disclosure mentioned, "It's the same as whether I have a competent or not yet competent intern. We still need to understand what their skill set is and how we can best use them. So I don't look at it in terms of, like, this is a challenge. It's just understanding what that individual can do, so not knowing is the worst thing."

So we wanted to work with this and change this perception. But we needed, as Tom mentioned, the sort of student side and while we're not covering the student study in this talk right now, we did pick out a couple of quotes that supported or was in contrast to what the host organisations mentioned. The first one was, "While it" ‑ disclosure ‑ "might be helpful to an internship, it might have negative repercussions, and getting a job in the future and even like going to other people that I know in the industry for support, it's like there's so much stigma around being disabled and being in the workforce that it's just something that we're kind of taught not to disclose."

And another student had said, "Getting people to think, what does that mean for you? How does that impact? So actually getting people" ‑ including the host organisations and the WIL supervisors ‑ "to stop, ask and listen about how your disability affects you." So, Tom, I will hand it over to you.

THOMAS: That's a really nice segue. That, I think, Tanya, was a really common theme throughout the whole project was this concept of stop, ask and listen. So from all of that data that we collected, both the literature review, the desktop audit, the stories from industry and the stories from the students, we collated all that data and started to develop up four different resources. And that was about developing it across the different stages of developing up a work integrated learning experience.

The first resource that we developed up ‑ before I go on, we also wanted to make it really clear that the resources that we were to develop up was to use a universal design approach. We didn't want the resources to be specific, necessarily, for people with a disability. We wanted to have this universal approach that would create a positive learning experience for all students. And in the design, we really tried to use terminology and words that you could ask every student, and that would support their learning to try and address the elephant in the room around disclosure, because we believe you shouldn't need to disclose, but what we should be able to talk about is how do we have a successful learning experience.

So the first resource was a series of questions that the host organisation could ask the student. And those questions were divided up into questions you ask pre‑placement, so before the student arrives; some questions that you can ask the student during the placement; and then a series of questions that you ask after the placement has finished. And I have slipped my language already. I know I'm already talking about placements but we chose to use the word "placement" as it was a more kind of general term for work integrated learning experiences, and we wanted to use a fairly simple term to try and cover most work integrated learning experiences. So we did use that word "placement".

On the first resource we then developed up a series of reflection questions that would help the organisation think about how it went from their perspective and was there anything else that they could do to improve the experience for the next group of students.

Some of the questions that we posted on this first resource were: what are your strengths and things that you like to work on, as a pre‑placement question. Would you like to highlight to us any strategies that we may use to support your experience while you're on placement with us? And they're just some key questions to try and highlight that we're taking that strengths‑based approach, what is it that you need, and can be really used in a more general approach or universal design approach.

The second resource that we developed up was ‑ I hesitate to use this word, but a checklist. It was more of a prompt list. And the reason I struggled with the term "checklist" is we didn't want to communicate to host organisations that if they just had these documents in place that that was good enough. We really wanted to have a prompt sheet that helped the organisation think about what they needed to have in place before hosting a student ‑ hosting any student, but particularly students with disabilities. So when we developed up this prompt sheet, we really thought about the questions and how we could phrase those questions to make sure that they were ‑ that they didn't just have a policy or procedure in place but how are they implementing that policy or procedure. Do you have an onboarding process that provides a supporting opportunity to discuss reasonable adjustments? And then we explained what some of those reasonable adjustments might be.

In this prompt sheet we also then linked to some really common websites that might explain things that organisations may not have heard of. For example, the prompt sheet suggests that they have a designed and implemented Disability Action Plan. Some organisations may not know what that is, so we then linked to a few different websites that talked about what a Disability Action Plan is, and how you could implement that in your work site. So the prompt sheet was really about guiding and supporting the organisation to think about what they might do to prepare for a student on placement.

The third resource that we developed was a series of scenarios. And this was based specifically from the industry who were very keen to have some concrete examples of what reasonable adjustments might look like, and linking back into what Tanya talked about as to who to call if there's issues or challenges, and how does that tripartisanship relationship work. So the ‑ what we did was we used a series of case scenarios to provide a very brief example of what happened on a placement, what the adjustments ‑ what adjustments were implemented, and who was connected with those adjustments.

In developing the scenarios we were quite conscious about making them practical, realistic, and diverse. So we've also included a scenario around an LGBTIQA+ scenario to ensure that, again, we weren't just talking about reasonable adjustments from a disability perspective, but as an inclusive and universal design perspective.

TANYA: Can I ‑ ‑ ‑

THOMAS: Yes.

TANYA: Sorry, Tom, to interrupt you. I just wanted to mention you will see the resources have been developed with a health degree or health student in mind, but that can be changed to any degree, and each of these case studies can apply to a whole variety of disciplines as well.

THOMAS: Thanks, Tanya. I completely forgot about that point. And the final resource that we developed was this resource did take a little bit more of a disability focus. And what we wanted to do was to have some more broader recommendations and suggestions for how an organisation may be able to prepare and implement a placement for a student with a disability. So this one is a little bit more about hints and tips and reminders to create some of that confidence and reassurance to the host organisation that they can do this. Because I think that's one of the messages that we got from organisations, is that they're really keen and passionate but there is an underlying fear that they will get it wrong, and that they might create some damage or harm.

So some key points here is things like don't be surprised by different and unusual requests, and be honest if you don't know how to help. So it's about giving the host organisation permission to kind of put their hand up and say, "Hey, this is new. We're not sure about this. Who can we ask for help? We really want to have a go. We're frightened of creating harm so how can we actually make sure we don't create harm." As opposed to saying, "We're frightened of creating harm, so let's not do it." And I think, Tanya, we are quickly moving out of time so I might leave it for the questions. So I will hand back to you.

TANYA: I just want to briefly cover this slide, and it's about what's next, and what we are proposing is that we need to move to a strengths‑based approach to provide an inclusive and equitable WIL for students with a disability. Higher education institutions really need to review and improve and monitor their current practices, policies and guidelines because we need to make sure that WIL coordinators, host organisations, supervisors and students are all talking together and are on that same page. And what we should be doing ‑ we know those documents are back ‑ you know, 1992, the DDA, and even while there were revisions to other documents, they are still based on information from years ago.

So utilising documents from the Australian Disability Strategy and the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons With Disability to help change that discourse as well, and also improve the language and the terminology that we're using in those documents. So, you know, if you are from a university, as I said before, go back and look at your WIL documents and your disability documents that have been prepared and look at that language and look at the links between those two documents, and see if there are any, and then advocate for more ‑ for better processes there.

We feel that higher education institutions, as they are the drivers of WIL, have a key role to ensure that sustained tripartite relationship between those three stakeholders and that is so, so key for WIL to be successful. And the other is that we would really like host organisations to use the resources that Tom has just presented today.

And then lastly here we just wanted to share some outputs from our project. So excited, Tom and I, that the scoping review that we've talked about here has actually been published in the Higher Education Research and Development Journal. It's been on Twitter the last couple of days, so that's been super cool for us. Sorry, it's very exciting. So happy for you to have a look at that and if you would like a link to that, we can do that. We have the review, the desktop review paper has been accepted and we're just waiting for it to go through the process from the International Journal of WIL. We also have one paper with the information and a lot more that we spoke about today in the special edition in the International Journal of WIL, and we can let you know when that's happening as well, and we are currently putting together a paper on the student experiences with disability.

We also have the ACEN report. So on the website there there is the link to the report for the whole project, and also ‑ and that will have more information about the resources and the review of some of the other videos and things that we reviewed as part of the project. And we've done sort of a couple of presentations to share our work here as well. But on that, I think we will now open for questions, if that's okay, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE: Yes, that would be fantastic. I'm going to start with a question that we had from our registration process, and it's a question about inherent requirements. The question is: I have seen the term "inherent requirements" for a course used as a barrier to equity. How can we ensure students get fair WIL?

THOMAS: That's a great question. And I could actually talk about that for hours because that's ‑ I think, yes, inherent requirements are a fairly controversial document within the education space. My personal belief is that what's happening is the way that they're worded and communicated at the moment sets up a barrier and communicates an assumption that if you aren't able to do X, Y or Z then it's not even worth applying.

At UC we are really focused on reviewing and considering our inherent requirements, and thinking about how that is actually communicating to people with disability, because what inherent requirements should do is more articulate what is it about the work that you want to do or need to do. So I'm an occupational therapist by trade. Our profession is always about engaging with people, and the inherent requirement is that you would like to work with people, that you enjoy working with people, or that you would like to understand people. And I think the way that it's communicated in inherent requirements at the moment is around you must be able to communicate with people. Yet how we communicate with people is really diverse and should be ‑ there is reasonable adjustments everywhere that should enable people to be able to still be an occupational therapist. So I think we've got to be really careful with how inherent requirements are developed and communicated because it does, it puts up the first hurdle, which I think is unnecessary or unreasonable.

GABRIELLE: That's great, Tom. Thanks very much for that. And, yes, we did have a pre‑webinar discussion about this and got very excited and passionate about it. The next question is from Meg: how are universities currently building their understanding of students with diverse needs? And what do they require to access and participate equitably both on campus and with their WIL hosts. This might have been partly answered already.

THOMAS: Did you want me to start, Tanya?

TANYA: Yeah, I'm happy for that.

THOMAS: I think it's an individual university answer. However, I think what we found in both the literature review and in the studies we completed is the pressure and the burden is actually still on the student to disclose and to seek support, and that, again, is something that we, as educational institutions, need to be much more conscious of, because you can't get reasonable adjustments and you can't get assistance and you can't get anything unless you disclose. Where we need to really challenge ourselves to think more around universal design and thinking about how we can develop a lot of our materials and resources that meet the needs of everybody.

The other thing that we need to think about is how we are communicating and developing those processes because, again, it is up to the student ‑ the student needs to be incredibly ‑ they need to be an incredible advocate for themselves already to be able to go out and source and access those things. I think most universities are trying really hard to make inclusion programs and things accessible. However, the burden of responsibility still lies with the student. They have to tick the box to say they have a disability. They need to make an appointment with a medical professional to prove they have a disability. They then need to take those documents to an inclusion process to prove and talk about what it might need to look like. So we need to actually think about how we can streamline and make that a little bit more effective.

TANYA: And the other thing ‑ sorry, Gabrielle.

GABRIELLE: Go, Tanya, I agree.

TANYA: I was going to say the other thing to note is that at universities, when we're talking about reasonable adjustments or we have a reasonable adjustment plan here, we have two types of reasonable adjustment plans, and one is for students when they are doing their core units in the classroom. And for a student who is then going out on their work integrated learning experience, they have to apply for a second reasonable adjustment plan because there are different needs in there, but often students don't know that they need a separate reasonable adjustment plan. And I think that we need to align maybe those plans a little bit better, if we can, to address the sort of needs ‑ I know there are two different processes in the classroom, two different learning experiences, but so many students are missing out on receiving ‑ you know, having adjustments put in place so they can actually get the best from that placement. So I think that's somewhere that we also need to do a lot better.

GABRIELLE: Thanks, Tanya. The next question is about part‑time placements ‑ and this is another sort of area of tension. At times we're told that part‑time placements are not possible due to accreditation requirements. Is this a reason to not allow a part‑time placement?

THOMAS: I have a controversial opinion on that for you. I don't know every discipline's accreditation requirements off by heart, but from working within the multi‑disciplinary area here at UC, I believe that an accrediting body cannot mandate that part‑time placements are not allowed. I know occupational therapy we are allowed part‑time placements and it is permitted. I also believe that for the registered professionals ‑ so AHPRA, the Allied Health Registered Health Professionals, you actually are mandated to provide reasonable adjustments which includes part‑time work. So the idea that an accreditation requirement restricts a part‑time placement, I would be challenging that.

TANYA: Yeah. I think we need to advocate for that more and when we look at when a student goes out into the workplace, they can do part‑time work, they can do, you know, three or four days a week. And one of the students ‑ just going to the student interview, was that they were being forced to do full‑time placement, which didn't suit them. They needed to go on placement three, four days a week so they could manage their condition. Then when they went into the workplace, the workplace was totally flexible, you know, to allow them to do that. So we do need to rethink placements and we do need to rethink ‑ to advocate to those accrediting bodies more about what is realistic and what isn't.

GABRIELLE: And I think it's also about a level of convenience to fit into a semester timetable.

TANYA: Yeah.

GABRIELLE: So I think you are right. People tend to ignore the fact that in the real world people work part‑time. Thank you so much for that. So probably maybe one or two ‑ probably one more question I think that we've got. Do you share these resources with all host organisations? I'm looking at ways to support students who are not connected with disability support, such as barriers to diagnosis, not disclosed, developing conditions. And be proactive to approach onboarding partners, but also don't want to create the impression that all placements will need to have adjustments.

TANYA: We will be ‑ we recommend sharing these regardless, I think, of whether the organisation is hosting or has ever hosted a student with a disability. I think, as Tom spoke before, you know, we've based this on a universal design. Tom, you can jump in here, if you like, but we will be sharing them with all our host organisations, not only in the health area but across the other faculties here at the University of Canberra, and encouraging organisations to actually sort of step forward, if you like, as well and seek additional help. We will go to them and ask them if they need help in understanding resources and hosting a student with ‑ and doing their best, you know, what they need to do and giving some guidance there. But I think it's ‑ yeah, I will leave it there and I will let Tom because of the time. I was going to go on another tangent.

THOMAS: You can tangent away, if you like.

TANYA: No, you go, Tom.

THOMAS: Look, I think there is a level ‑ we need to think about this again from a universal perspective because there is a level of reasonable adjustment for every student with their learning. Every student and every person will learn and perform in a different way. So I think it's about developing that open communication, and some of those resources and questions will hopefully lead to prompting to say that, you know, "What is it that we can do to support you to show us your best and show us your most successful side?" And I think if we do that with everybody, there is no harm in doing it.

GABRIELLE: Thank you so much, Tanya and Thomas. I mean, as you said, we could talk for hours on this but unfortunately we can't today. It's been great having your insights and it's fabulous that there is a resource hosted on the ACEN website that has all the information that you talked about today.

So just before we finish today, I want to give a plug for ADCET's WIL community of practice, if people aren't aware of that, and if they're a WIL practitioner that are in that space, we encourage you to join that, and it will extend on the work that Tanya and Thomas have started with their ACEN research. You can find that link to the communities of practice on our website. And of course, there was a lot of discussion about UDL as well, and we have a range of resources around UDL if that's something that people are new to. And in particular, we've got an e‑learning program on that.

OUTRO: Thank you for listening to this ADCET podcast. We hope you learnt something new about making tertiary education more inclusive and accessible for all students. You can keep up to date with our future webinars and podcasts at our website and by signing up for our regular newsletter by visiting [www.adcet.edu.au/newsletter.](https://www.adcet.edu.au/newsletter.)

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