Welcome to the Universal Design and Inclusion Awards presentation.

First, an acknowledgement of traditional custodians. The AccessAbility and Inclusion team at La Trobe University acknowledge the traditional custodians of the different lands we reside on today and pay our deepest respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We celebrate the continuing culture, strengths and resilience of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and acknowledged that sovereignty was never ceded.

To introduce myself, I'm Kelly Bramston. I'm an AccessAbility Advisor working on the Bundoora Campus at La Trobe University, my pronouns are she/her. In this video I have shoulder length dark hair and I wear glasses. Today I'd like to talk to you about La Trobe University Universal Design and Inclusion awards.

So, we'll cover a bit of an introduction on the Universal Design and Inclusion Awards themselves. The purpose behind the awards. I'd like to give you some examples of some student nominations, some of the staff responses, and a conclusion and some contact details.

The awards were actually introduced in 2021 at the request of a student who was looking for a way to acknowledge the work of an academic who'd gone above and beyond to provide an inclusive learning experience. It was really important to us to acknowledge that the voice of the student in saying what they felt was inclusive.

And at the same time, encourage staff to embrace those universal design principles.

So, we put together some criteria for nominations onto a website that's attached to our AccessAbility and Inclusion website, and then that gave students a place to go to nominate and let us know what their inclusive experience was like with that academical staff member. On this slide, you can see a photo of some of the recipients receiving their award.

So initially nominations were targeted at academics. However, we've now opened the awards to all university staff at the request of students wanting to nominate people from other areas of the university. The awards are not open to AccessAbility Advisors, however, as we believe a criteria for nominations is already part of our role. During 2021, we received 23 nominations, 2022, 18 and so far, this year we've received 18 and that number will continue to climb. So, we feel it's had a really good uptake. All staff nominated receive an award at a morning tea that is attended by those staff both in person and virtually which we organise at the end of the year.

We advertise the awards on the University Universal Design Inclusion Awards web page that is attached to our AccessAbility and Inclusion website. We also put information in our newsletter, and we have informed discussions with students. If they mention staff members, they've had really good experiences with, we'll make sure they are aware that they can make nomination if they would like to.

So, we believe that the awards are a really positive approach to making change in the university that embraces, embraces universal design principles but is prompted by the student voice and by positive experiences and is encouraged in a way that is embracing change slowly but surely through, you know, changing process and practices over time.

So, I'll go through the four criteria that we have for the nominations. The first one is to recognise and award university staff who have gone above and beyond to actively welcome students to La Trobe University and to assist them to have a positive, affirming and successful experience. So, here's an example of one of the nominations that a student submitted, which was under this criteria. Darren is hands down one of the most caring staff members I've come across during my six years at La Trobe University. Despite his insanely busy workload, he always makes time for every individual student and will go above and beyond to accommodate for those who have a LAP, which is our learning access plan. Darren always demonstrates professional empathy and empowers all students with the ability to achieve.

So, we just thought that was a really good example of a student nomination in that criteria.

So, criteria two for the award is to recognise and award university staff who have fostered an inclusive learning environment that supports the contribution and well-being of all. So, the following is an example of a student nomination in this category.

From our first class, Quinn went above and beyond to ensure the content and classes were accessible and enjoyable for all. He was so kind, considerate and empathetic to our situations and made accommodations for me personally while I navigated some rough personal waters. I would love nothing more than for him to be officially recognised for the lasting impact he has had on so many of us.

There are so many things’ academics and institutions could learn from Quinn. I aspire to have a career in leadership; I often reflect on the respect and admiration we have for him and hope by leading with kindness and compassion, I earn the same from my peers.

Criteria three is to recognise and award university staff who have assisted students to implement academic adjustments that are over and above LAP recommendations, where appropriate. So, LAP being learning access plans. This is another example of somebody who made a nomination in this category. Daniel took the time to make sure that the library lending system was completely changed when he learned about my access struggles. He did this voluntarily, and in his own time. Daniel offered to scan books and resources for me so that I had a theoretical understanding of my new area of study. He took a lot of time behind the scenes to make up a more equitable environment, and the choices he made in doing so led to other staff acting in a similar way. He has made a change for all future cohorts of students, not just me.

And this is the criterion four, for the awards to recognise and award university staff who have created a curriculum that includes more than one way for students to learn and show their understanding via enhanced accessibility of learning content and delivery, including multiple means of engagement, representation, action and expression. So, this is one of the student nominations in this category. Bec has by far been the academic I've seen put the most effort into being inclusive and welcoming to all students. Adding subtitles to recorded lecture content, adding live subtitles via PowerPoint when giving lectures over Zoom, presenting content in various modalities. As a neurodivergent student, Rebecca has been approachable when I have needed assistance. Bec prioritises accessibility for all her students. She's generous, sensitive, and kind. When beginning to work with a student she asks what their preferences are and how she can support them. She makes everyone feel included, capable and valid for sharing her personal experiences, being upfront about matters of equity, and proactive about supporting students’ well-being.

So, I also wanted to read out two staff responses when receiving a nomination by a student. One was from a staff member in 2021 and they said it is incredibly moving that a student suggested that we have these awards. It means a huge amount to me to know that students feel the impact of our efforts, and incredible that the little things that we do have profound implications for students lives and academic achievement.

And the second one we received from staff. You can imagine my utter surprised to have received this award. It feels even more special, as the lovely feedback suggested might help before 2022 has been long term impactful. It's so nice that your department offers such acknowledgement and that the nominations come from the students. You have absolutely made my day. So, you can see that both for students and staff, it's a real opportunity for acknowledgement and recognition and positive change.

Last year, we received a nomination from a student for our Vice Chancellor.

And in that nomination, the student said John made time to meet with me via Zoom. He didn't just listen to my story, he actively set about making most of the changes I suggested. Mostly minor administrative issues that beleaguered neurodiverse students like me. Whilst I understand that it is part of John's job, what was different is that he spent an hour of his time on Zoom with only himself, me and one other person listening to all I had to say. I am nominating him because this has and will continue to make a material difference in the lives of future cohorts of students.

Of course, we invited John along to the awards last year and he was unable to make it because he needed to be in Canberra, but he was very nice to record this video for us, which I'll play now. I'm really honored to be recognized with an AccessAbility and Inclusion award alongside some of our extraordinary academic and student advising staff. I don't know that I should be receiving the award today. The student who contacted me is the one who deserves recognition. But I'm really grateful to her for sharing her experiences with me and for suggesting some improvements we could make so that La Trobe becomes more accessible and inclusive place to study. It was a really important reminder that making small changes, changes that might appear insignificant or minor to us as staff, can still have a huge impact for our students. So, thank you again and well done to all of those being recognized with an award today.

So, in conclusion, I would just like to say that the intention of the awards is really to recognise and acknowledge staff who are champions of change, willing to actively embrace universal design for learning practices to improve the student experience.

Students appreciate having an impact on what they believe constitutes good educational experience, and staff are encouraged to continue to help make this possible.

On the final slide, I've just listed our link for our AccessAbility and Inclusion website at La Trobe University, our contact number and e-mail address so that if you have any further questions or would like to discuss anything about the awards, you can contact us. Thank you very much for your time.