

## **Empowering Disability Services in Australian Higher Education: A Participatory Action Research Project on Professional Standards, Service Evaluation, and Capacity Building**

### **Participant Information Sheet – Staff and Student Interviews**

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#### **1. Invitation**

You're invited to participate in research examining how disability practitioners can best support students with disability at Australian universities. We're taking a participatory action research approach, using surveys, interviews, focus groups, and workshops to develop practical solutions for true disability inclusion in higher education. Participatory action research involves the people affected by an issue working alongside researchers to study the problem and develop solutions together.

This EOI is for students who have accessed university disability support services AND disability support staff who want to participate in a semi-structured online interview (approximately 45 minutes) about the cultures, assumptions, and systemic challenges surrounding disability support services.

In this EOI you will need to read the participant information, complete a consent question, confirm your eligibility for the study, and provide some optional demographic data including your disability status, age, gender, First Nations status, and highest qualification completed. Once you have submitted your EOI, the research team will confirm your eligibility and be in contact to schedule an interview sometime between August and October 2025.

**[Complete the EOI via Qualtrics here](https://utas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_engAbFOoxr2hBD8)**

**[[https://utas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_engAbFOoxr2hBD8](https://utas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_engAbFOoxr2hBD8)]**

## **2. What is the purpose of this study?**

This research project, being undertaken as a part of an Equity Fellowship funded by the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES), aims to understand the current experience of disability practitioners in Australian universities, and collect insight into how universities can improve their disability support offerings through practitioner up-skilling, organisational capacity building, and service design. We want to answer the following questions:

- a. What is the current state of student disability support provision in Australian universities? (e.g. number of practitioners, key roles and responsibilities, caseloads, skillsets)
- b. What is the experience of disability practitioners working in Australian universities? (e.g. experiences of case load, skillsets, desired development and training)
- c. What skills and traits do disability practitioners need to effectively support students?

Our research so far is revealing both progress and persistent gaps. Some students continue experiencing poor support, low disability confidence from staff, and structural barriers to having adjustments implemented. Meanwhile, disability practitioners face their own barriers to doing their best work and services experience persistent resourcing and workload challenges. Alongside these experiences, we've been hearing from university leaders and other sector stakeholders to unpack some of the big picture challenges and opportunities in enabling disability inclusion and success in universities. These solution-oriented interviews aim to deepen our understanding of systemic challenges and help us develop pathways for meaningful change through cultural and organisational transformation, informed by community experiences and perspectives.

## **3. How is the study being funded?**

This study is funded as a part of an Equity Fellowship funded by the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES). Darlene McLennan has been awarded funding to benchmark the operation of university disability support services for the first time; consider gaps in practitioner capacity building; and contribute towards the development of the first tailored disability practitioner qualification in Australia in a way that is informed by the lived experience of practitioners and the students they support.

#### 4. Why have I been invited to participate?

You are eligible to take part in this study because you are:

- a. A current or former disability practitioner who has worked in this role for at least 6 months at an Australian university; and is over 18 years of age, or
- b. A current or former university student who has accessed disability services at an Australian university; and is over 18 years of age.

Your participation is voluntary, and your choice to take part or not take part will not affect your reputation or the reputation of your university. It will not impact your grades, job prospects, or ability to access support. Your information will not be shared with your university.

#### 5. What will I be asked to do?

If you would like to participate in an online interview, you will need to express your interest by reading this document and completing the EOI Form via Qualtrics by Friday 17 October 2025. This will take you approximately five minutes. The consent form will ask you to confirm your eligibility as per the criteria above; give your contact information; ask a few short demographic questions including your age, gender, disability status, and university you attend/work at; and collect any access needs you may have to support your participation. Once you have submitted your EOI, the research team will confirm your eligibility and be in contact to schedule an interview. After we have confirmed your eligibility, we will send you a link to an online form where you will be able to select an interview timeslot that suits you. You will also be able to tell us about any accessibility requirements you may have, and let us know if there is any other information we need to help make your interview comfortable and successful.

Because we have limited time, resourcing, and funding, we may not be able to include everyone who applies to be a part of this study. We will be allocating interview slots on a first-come, first-served basis.

In your online (Zoom) interview, you will be asked a series of questions about the cultures, assumptions, and systemic challenges surrounding disability support services. **We will** be particularly interested in hearing your views on the solutions to big picture challenges the sector is facing, including resourcing and funding challenges, cultural and attitudinal barriers such as ableism and the application of the medical model of disability in support provision, and on the way that disability support services are perceived and prioritised in universities. **We will not** be talking about details of your course of study; your disability medical condition, or mental illness; your specific reasons for accessing support; or your experiences of university access in general.

The interviews will be semi-structured, which means we will have some questions we will ask everyone, but there will be space to explore your experiences and views in a less structured way too.

Each interview will take approximately 45 minutes. You can choose to answer each question in as much or as little detail as you like. You will be able to participate verbally, in the Zoom chat, or write out your responses on a shared document if you prefer. If you need an interpreter or communication supporter to facilitate your inclusion, you can tell us this in your online registration and we will make sure that one is provided for you (or you can bring your own if you prefer). Please note that if you require an Auslan interpreter, these can be difficult to secure on short notice, so please keep this in mind when selecting your interview slot. We will make sure that we provide materials in formats which suit you: please tell us what you need in the online form.

Each interview will be recorded and transcribed by Zoom so that we can analyse what you said. Only the research team will be able to see what you said: anyone else accessing the data will not be able to identify you personally in the dataset.

## **6. Are there any possible benefits from participation in this study?**

These solution-oriented interviews will deepen our understanding of systemic challenges and help us develop pathways for meaningful change through cultural and organisational transformation, informed by community experiences and perspectives. The research findings will form part of the recommendations made to support systemic change as part of the final Fellowship Report.

## **7. Are there any possible risks from participation in this study?**

This research has been designed to minimise risks to participants. All information you chose to share with us about your personal experience will only be shared in a deidentified way, so you won't face any workplace or educational consequences for your involvement. We will not be talking about details of your course of study; your disability medical condition, or mental illness; your specific reasons for accessing support; or your experiences of university access in general.

While there are no physical or legal risks to you, there is a small chance that you might feel mild discomfort when discussing workplace or learning barriers or challenges, though this isn't the focus of the research. To address this, you can choose how much you want to share, and we have provided links to support services you can access if you need to.

The research team is particularly mindful of accessibility and cultural sensitivities, especially for participants with disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants and those from culturally and/or racially marginalised backgrounds. The team have completed cultural awareness training to ensure respectful engagement, and have extensive experience working with people with disability.

If you're feeling uncomfortable or anxious during or after completing your interview, you can access the following services:

- **Lifeline Australia:** [13 11 14](tel:131114) - [Lifeline crisis support chat](#)
- **Beyond Blue:** [1300 224 636](tel:1300224636) - [Beyond Blue online chat](#)
- **Youth Beyond Blue** - <https://www.youthbeyondblue.com/>
- **Suicide Call Back Service:** [1300 659 467](tel:1300659467) - [Suicide Call Back Service online chat and video chat counselling](#)
- **1800Respect** — 1800 737 732
- **Relationships Australia** — 1300 364 277
- **QLife:** [1800 184 527](tel:1800184527)- <https://qlife.org.au/get-help>

## **8. What if I change my mind during or after the study?**

You can withdraw before, during, or after your interview by telling the research team that you don't wish to participate, by exiting the interview, or emailing us after your interview to tell us you don't want to participate. Once we have aggregated and deidentified the data, we won't be able to remove your data from our analysis because we won't be able to tell who is who in the data set.

## **9. What will happen to the data when this study is over?**

Recordings and transcriptions of the interviews will be stored on a University of Tasmania server for five years from the date of the study's completion. This server is password-protected and only accessible to the researchers of this study. Data will be destroyed at the end of the five years. Your data will only be disclosed to others in an identifiable if you share with the researchers any information about a safety risk to yourself or others.

## 10. How will the results of the study be published?

The data analysed as a part of this research project will be reproduced and disseminated in a range of outputs including published journals, a research report, fact sheets, practical and operational manuals for practitioners and service managers, and more. Due to the practical, professional focus of this research project, priority will be given to the creation of accessible, inclusive, and practical resources disseminated to practitioners and stakeholders to ensure the improvement of disability practitionership in Australian universities.

You will not be identifiable in any published outputs from this research activity. This means that if we include any quotes of what you said, your name or other identifying information (such as your university) will be removed. If you wish to be notified of the results of this study, please feel free to contact us.

## 11. What if I have questions about this study?

If you have any queries, concerns or issues with this study, please contact us:

1. **Darlene McLennan**, University of Tasmania. Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success (ACSES) Fellow. [Darlene.McLennan@utas.edu.au](mailto:Darlene.McLennan@utas.edu.au)
2. **Ebe Ganon**, University of Tasmania. Research Assistant.  
[Ebe.Ganon@utas.edu.au](mailto:Ebe.Ganon@utas.edu.au)

This study has been approved by the University of Tasmania Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC). If you have concerns or complaints about the conduct of this study, you can contact the Executive Officer of the HREC on (03) 6226 6254 or email [human.ethics@utas.edu.au](mailto:human.ethics@utas.edu.au). The Executive Officer is the person nominated to receive complaints from research participants. You will need to quote project number 31727.

## **12. How can I agree to be involved?**

To give consent, please [complete the EOI via Qualtrics](#).

Once you have submitted your EOI, the research team will confirm your eligibility and be in contact to schedule an interview. After we have confirmed your eligibility, we will send you a link to an online form where you will be able to select an interview timeslot that suits you. You will also be able to tell us about any accessibility requirements you may have, and let us know if there is any other information we need to help make your interview comfortable and successful.

You will receive an automated confirmation and an outline of the interview topics in advance of your interview.

If you have more questions before participating, please use the contact information above. If you need any information in a different format, please contact us using the information above.

**Thank you for your time**

**[Complete the EOI via Qualtrics here](#)**

**[[https://utas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_engAbFOoxr2hBD8](https://utas.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_engAbFOoxr2hBD8)]**