DARLENE: Ok, so thank you Nicole. I'm going to introduce Nicole and she will introduce her two other colleagues, Tim and David. So Nicole is presenting from the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. Nicole, David and Tim have both done a lot of work in regards to disability and/or mental health in the last couple of years, which has been fantastic to see the centre putting a spotlight onto this. It's going to assist us in the sector to plan and to work at improving how we support students with disabilities in their study and also, in future employment. So I'll hand over to you Nicole. Thank you so much.

NICOLE: Thank you, Darlene. Is my sound okay? Can you hear me?

DARLENE: Yeah. Maybe just a little bit closer maybe.

NICOLE: How’s that?

DARLENE: That’s much better.

NICOLE: Okay. Thank you. Hello, everyone. It's really great to be here today. As Darlene said, I'm Nicole Crawford from the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education and I'll use NCSEHE for short throughout the presentation. So the NCSEHE is a research and policy centre and it's funded by the Australian Government Department of Education, Skills and Employment and it's based at Curtin University. The NCSEHE really aims to connect research, policy and practice to improve higher education participation and success for students, particularly in equity groups, and that includes students with disability. The NCSEHE connects a range of activities and one of them is the Equity Fellows Program. That's a 12‑month Fellowship, and I had one of these in 2019‑2020 and David Eckstein and Tim Pitman are currently NCSEHE Equity Fellows. Moving onto the next slide, this afternoon the three of us are going to present some findings from each of our research projects. So David and Tim's projects have a specific focus on students with disability. My project focussed on university student mental wellbeing. So the plan is that I'll start, followed by David and then Tim. So we’ll move onto the next slide. Today, what I'm going to do is hone in on a few questions that I asked, particularly in the student survey, to get a sense of where the students who reported, for example, that they had a diagnosed mental health condition, also reported having a disability. I'll also touch on students' awareness of supports that they were actually eligible to access, such as disability accessibility services. So onto the next slide here. What I’ll do is start with a little bit of background information. What I actually did and how I did it. So my Fellowship was about exploring how we – when I saw “we”, I mean all of us in universities, academic and professional staff, teaching and support staff - how we can all be proactive in supporting university student mental wellbeing. Now, I focussed specifically on undergraduate mature‑aged students in and from regional and remote Australia. I was interested in the experiences and perspectives of all students in my target group, whether they had a mental health condition or not. On the next slide I have my methods. So it was a mixed method study and I used three methods of data collection. I got some national data, a student survey and student interviews. On the next slide ‑ I'm just going to provide a national context ‑ this is a table of domestic undergrad participation rates for students with disability and I've broken it down by geographical location and also by age. For geographical location I've divided the country up into metro, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote. When it comes to age I've divided it into two groups. So one group is all students, any age, and the second group are students who commenced their undergrad course at the age of 21 or older. So for all areas and all ages, 7.3 per cent of all undergrad domestic students in Australia reported having a disability. The proportion is higher for students who commenced their studies aged 21 years or older. It was 8.3%, and it's even higher when we look at the inner regional area. It's 9.3% for students aged 21 or older in inner regional Australia. This gives us an idea of the number of students who are eligible to use disability services in our universities. This umbrella term "students with disabilities" includes students with diagnosed mental health conditions and students with diagnosed medical conditions. Onto the next slide, I'm now going to look at three questions that I asked in the student survey, in the demographic student details section of the survey. In this table we have the responses to three questions. One question, do you have a disability? Second question, do you have a diagnosed medical condition? A third question, do you have a diagnosed mental health condition? Now, 12.1% of the survey respondents reported having a disability, and this is a few percentage points higher than the figures I was just talking about on the previous slide looking at the national data. 29.2% reported having a diagnosed medical condition. 31% reported having a diagnosed mental health condition. So far higher numbers of student participants reported having a diagnosed medical condition and/or a diagnosed mental health condition than having a disability. So what, you might ask? Well, this difference suggests that the university reporting and thus the national data might not be fully capturing the numbers of students with a diagnosed mental health condition or a medical condition who are actually eligible for assistance and adjustments, such as in the form of learning access plans. So it can be inferred that there are large numbers of students perhaps going without supports that they are eligible for and/or perhaps they're getting support from other parts of the university and outside of the university, too. Now, there's undoubtedly loads of complex reasons why students with diagnosed, temporary or fluctuating or permanent mental health or medical conditions might not also identify as having a disability. I don't have time to unpack them all now, but what I want to do is just share a couple of comments from the student interviews I did that might give us a few insights into why some students might not access the university disability or accessibility services when they have a mental health or medical condition. On the next slide we have a comment from an interviewee. I'll use the pseudonym Andrea. Andrea was an on‑campus student studying nursing at a small regional campus and she had this to say, "And so I was just lucky enough to run into my English tutor, who I built a really lovely rapport with, and she just happened to say to me, ‘Is everything okay today?’ And I was like, ‘No, it’s not’. And then she was the one that steered me towards the coordinator of disabilities. I remember saying to my tutor, ‘But I don't have a disability’ and she goes, ‘Well you kind of do, but it's a mental health one.’ And that’s when uni life became a bit more do-able for me”. So Andrea was not aware that her panic disorder was a condition that a university disability advisor could assist her with. She didn’t make the connection between the two. She didn't particularly identify with having a disability. However, once she became aware that there was someone on her campus who could help her and she actually met the disability adviser, then she went and got all the necessary reports from medical practitioners, then she was able to access the supports provided by the disability services at her university and as she said in the quote, all this made university more do‑able for her. On the next slide I have another interviewee, who I'll call Ursula, and Ursula was studying at a regional campus in a different state and this is what she had to say, “A staff member at the regional campus said, ‘You need to contact the student well-being people and you need to get an access plan’. I'm going, whoa, whoa, what is all this? That actually led to me being recognised. I had a condition impacting on my study, so yeah, but those six months were definitely impacting on my studies. You could see it in my grades. But then again the university was quite helpful. I'd never heard about this student wellbeing access centre. I had no idea. That was really awesome of them to do that”. Ursula was similarly unaware of her eligibility to access disability and accessibility services. So I'll just move onto my final slide and to finish off, I really want to ask, what does all of this mean? So students who are eligible might not be getting supports because they haven't identified for lots of different reasons, which is obviously a requirement to access disability or accessibility services. I am asking the question, what can we all do? Firstly, we can promote our university services, our university support services. Secondly, I'm making the point that a small action by a tutor or a librarian or a lecturer, as illustrated in the two comments by the interviewees, can really make a huge difference. Common to both student experiences was that they had one member of staff who actually knew them and helped them out. They pointed out the available supports, they helped them navigate the system and eventually receive the support that they needed. Thirdly, I want to make the point that support provision is complex and multifaceted. One size doesn't fit all. Plus, the responsibility for student support can't be placed solely on the shoulders of disability advisers or counselling units. These numbers are large numbers that we're talking about in the survey data that I mentioned earlier. Point four, this is where I think we can broaden it out to thinking about a whole of institution approach. Teaching staff can implement universal design for learning principles. Teaching and professional staff can guide and refer students to our support services, and teaching and professional staff can take proactive approaches. I'll just mention that they’re outlined in my report that will be released soon and in a short piece on the NCSEHE website and I'll pop the link to that in the chat shortly. Thank you very much, and now I'm moving onto the next slide and over to David.

DAVID: Hi, thank you very much, Nicole, and thank you ATEND for having me. My Fellowship research project focussed on issues concerning the provision of targeted career support for university students with disability. I want to discuss one or two key findings from the research project with you. Specifically, to talk about career support for students with disability. I also wanted to finish my remarks with a note about a new national career development learning community of practice for people that provide, or would like to provide, targeted career support for students with disability. I want to start with a note that service silos are probably one of the most effective barriers towards universities providing targeted career support for students with disability. While in recent years there has been some improvement in university's ability to provide targeted career services, the siloing issue remains particularly potent. It is so potent, because it actually prevents collaboration between services and that's what's required to provide effective career support for students with disability. As I'm about to explain one of the biggest factors in keeping services separate, I think is a persistent misunderstanding. I'm tempted to call it an ancient muddle about what actually constitutes career helpfulness for students with disability. So if we could move to the next slide, Nicole, we’ll have a look at some information. So when staff were asked ‑ this is both disability staff, career staff, academic and support staff and general professional staff ‑ what the best source of support is for students with disability, to help them get the work they want after university, it looks pretty straightforward. Most people, 68% of respondents say well, it's the university careers office. Then 56% say it's an industry contact. Then we move down the list and we see university disability support office, the placement or internship office. Then we get to friends and family and academic and teaching staff are at the bottom of the list. It looks quite straightforward, but when you begin to drill down into those responses, then a different picture emerges. If we could look at the next slide then we'll see that there's quite a bit of disparity that creeps in. Both in the trends of the responses, but also in the destination that students should go to. Based on - those differences are based on where respondents are working. If you're working in a career’s office, then 92.1% of you will say, "Well, you should go to the university career service for specialist support." Disability staff are a little more democratic and saying yes, it's the university careers office, but equal first for disability staff is the placement or internship office. That appears to be because disability staff are particularly aware of students' lack of experience, because they deal with students so frequently. Other career staff will say yes, okay, we'll send you to the career’s office, but a substantial proportion of professional staff don't know about the careers office, where to send them. Then we get down to it with academic and teaching staff, the industry contact is the most important source for support, as far as they're concerned, as far as they’re aware and there are good reasons for this but I think it’s particularly instructive to see that half of the academic and teaching staff nominate an industry contact as the most important contact or strategy or support for students with disability. The university careers office is way down the list. It only gets 36.1% of staff votes. It's behind things like the disability support office, academic and teaching staff themselves. This is really very important, because what it does, as we'll see on the next slide, is align in key ways with student responses. If we can have a look at the next slide, then you'll see that students similarly don't rate the careers office. But they do rate an industry contact and the second most important source of support that they rate are academic and teaching staff themselves and this aligns with other findings in the literature that show that students in general ‑ not just students with disability ‑ but students in general typically go to academic and teaching staff for career support and many of them it appears don't find their way to the careers office. You might think, so what if people speak to contacts in industry, then that's going to be their "in" and they will get good advice, because they'll be talking to people that know what they're talking about. But that really is the crux of the issue. When you place emphasis on personal contact, then what tends to happen is that the candidate devalues their own ability, their own skills and their own experience. This appears to be what's happening with students with disability. Student feedback collected by my Fellowship indicates that's pretty much what they think, a key barrier for them getting employment is not being recommended by their teacher for work. The other thing I wanted to say about that is that this is not an issue that's restricted to students with disability, but I think it's particularly potent for students with disability, because when they do share information, they're used to having disability imposed on them. The range of responses that the Fellowship has gathered shows that students with disability bring a range of attitudes towards their career's thinking. There are some students with disability who seem particularly adept at career management and don't have much to learn about it as well. There are things that they can enhance. They come with targeted specific questions, but most students with disability need to learn how to better understand their career management responsibility. That's what the careers office actually helps with. It's interesting that - this is where we get to the point about career helpfulness. If we could move to the next slide. I want to finish with some remarks about what the careers office actually does. For a long time, a careers office or a careers practitioner in general would have diagnosed its client, in terms of what they were capable of, if they had a disability, what they should go and do with what they've learned. But the development of the career practitioner profession that I belong to is now characterised much more by social models of learning and of understanding people themselves and their place in the world and how they want to develop that place in the world. It's much less of a positivist and it’s much more of a constructivist approach that acknowledges that understanding the world is inherently personal. People want to apply skills in very personal ways, because their sense of purpose will be very individual. When it comes to providing advice to a student, it's something that careers practitioners tend not to do. We tend instead to engage students in reflective activity to help them clarify dilemmas, to help them set their own priorities and strategies for achieving those priorities. This doesn't change when the student presents with disability, but what does change is the career practitioner confidence to deal with the issues that the student presents. The students with disability come with particular needs. This is where the issue of collaboration between services becomes very, very important. Careers practitioners are not terribly confident about dealing with things like helping students understand what role disability plays in their careers thinking, but if we bring it back to first principles, that's up to the student. We need to ask the right questions of the student to help them better understand their careers thinking. But it's the careers practitioner's lack of familiarity with this particular kind of inclusion that creates a barrier. What we've found is that the targeted initiatives to provide career support for students with disability, the ones that help students flourish, are the ones that are co‑led by staff from the career’s office, by staff from the disability office, but also to a certain extent by the students themselves. That's what we need to be able to focus on in order to make the most of the resources that we have at our fingertips right now. Things like contact with employers, things like the Australian network on disability, job access, but also collaboration with DES partnerships through the USEP program, through the grant wise program. These are resources we can use to great effect if we understand the way in which students engage with them. The thing that I'd like to finish with is this note that a community of practice that's emerging from this Fellowship focuses on those very issues ‑ how to use available resources, how to understand the issues and the choices that are involved and how to help the students with disability place more appropriate value, both on their abilities and on the role in which their experience of disability should or should not play in their careers thinking, based not just on their experience, but largely on their professional aspiration and their professional goals. That's the thought that I'd like to leave you with. It's going to be a very exciting year but the stakes are quite high. The latest graduate outcome survey indicates students with disability are doing less well this year than they did last year. I think the reasons for that are likely to do with COVID, but we need further research to help us understand that. But in the meantime, I think it's a really exciting prospect to be able to better integrate our existing resources to help students with disability more effectively decide what it is they'd like to do with their learning and what they'd like to learn next. I'll hand back to Nicole now, who'll take you to Tim. Thank you very much.

NICOLE: Sorry, Tim. My slides have just frozen. So please start and I will just stop sharing and start again. Just completely frozen.

TIM: No worries. Can you hear me okay, Nicole?

DARLENE: It's Darlene here, Tim. We can.

TIM: Great. Thank you. Okay. Just while we're waiting for those slides to unfreeze, I just want to start by I'm coming to you from Perth and I want to acknowledge that I’m on Whadjuk Noongar lands and I want to acknowledge their Elders past and present, and thank you very much to both Nicole and David for those excellent presentations. I'm going to ‑ when the slides are up ‑ cycle through them quite quickly because I just want to get to the final one because I think - I've been listening really intently to what my colleagues have been saying and there's absolutely some synthesis we can do around the notion of universal design for learning principles. So if the slides are working, Nicole, can you just go to the next one. Basically I'm going to present findings and talk briefly about a survey of over 1700 students with disability asking them if they're well supported and this happened in 2020, so the next slide, please. Basically they found - the students said that universities were very good at supporting them in terms of attitudes, how people respond, act and behave to them, but a qualifier there, remembering a lot of disabilities are hidden and students do have, or at least some students with disability have agency in how they can present themselves. Also, students are very happy generally with the processes for ensuring they know what their rights are and what support they can get. To the next slide, please, Nic. Universities are doing so‑so in terms of the physical or built environment. Here we've got to think beyond things such as ramps and chair lifts. We've also got to think about lighting, sensory sound levels, et cetera. Also, universities are so-so in respect of technological support. Increasingly students are bringing their own solutions, solutions that they've grown up with or developed through primary, secondary education and just through navigating life and they want universities to incorporate those solutions they bring with them into the curriculum pedagogy. Next slide, Nic. Where universities really need to pick up on is social inclusion, having students feel included and part of university life. This is really underrated. It's known, but it's underrated. This is a critical part of why people go to universities. It is a very important communal and social aspect and a lot of students with disabilities are excluded from it. Communication is perhaps the most worrying finding because this is not just talking about how we communicate their rights to them. This is communication in the classroom. This is how they learn and how they understand and the assessments that are made for them and how knowledge is communicated. Here universities, as rated by the students, are seen to be quite deficient. Next slide, please, Nic. Impact of COVID, can't do this year without acknowledging it. It's absolutely negatively affected disability support. These levels have worsened as the pandemic dragged on. A lot of students with disability were initially very happy with the support received, but it started to fray quite quickly as the pandemic dragged on. The other irony is that some students reported they'd been arguing for certain options, particularly on‑line options to be available to them, and their institutions said it's not possible. Suddenly the pandemic made it possible. Next slide, please, Nic. Regional students, I just wanted to quickly highlight that regional students have particular issues, the main one being around access to specialist services and this just becomes a snowballing effect on them and particularly during COVID, where a lot of them were particularly at‑risk and felt particularly marginalised and isolated. The digital divide is an ongoing support and support services at regional universities are also a concern in many cases. Next slide. So this is where I wanted to kind of - as I was listening to what both David and Nicole said, I think I'm not saying anything - I know I'm not saying anything new and I think there would be almost a universal agreement that we need a greater adoption of universal design learning principles. We need this, it's a requirement of our institutions. But listening to Nicole and listening to David, it really rams home the universality part of UDL. Nicole was talking very much about students with mental health disorders and her survey found about 30% or 31%, I think she said, my survey is 33%, so bang on, one in three students who define as having a disability have a mental health condition and like Nicole said, they're not necessarily aware that they can have accommodations made. But we also need to consider going to that next stage. Instead of accommodations, UDL is about how the class is taken and the lecturer and the teacher's understanding of how learning is delivered so that can be accommodated without the need for a learning access plan. That can be accommodated without the need for an intervention. It's not always going to be possible. Sometimes interventions are required and we need to remember that disability support as it's currently framed is often an intervention. It's a positive intervention. It's an important intervention, but it would be so much better if the intervention was not required in the first place. So many mental health issues could be avoided ‑ avoided is the wrong word ‑ could be managed better if UDL processes were adopted. Equally David talked – and one thing – he really, I thought, cut to the heart of was the confidence in career practitioners to deliver or to provide advice to students with disability, that they felt suddenly I'm now out of my comfort zone. That's another aspect of UDL. It's the training and the way in which careers advisers conceptualise their advice. Instead of going, I'm a career adviser, you're a student with disability, you need specialist support, I’m going to direct you to that specialist support, that's an intervention. It's how the careers advisers have professional development and have a sense of community of practice, that doesn't actually feel that it needs to change when a student with a disability is the one walking through the door.

DARLENE: Hi Tim, sorry it’s Darlene.

TIM: Yep.

DARLENE: We've only got probably a minute or so to go.

TIM: Yep. I’ll - - -

DARLENE: I know you are kind of wrapping up but, yep, thank you.

TIM: - - - wrap up there. That's the main thing I really wanted to focus on. We need to conceptualise UDL as much as possible and it really hits all aspects. Thanks, Darlene.