MERRIN MCCRACKEN: Thank you, Darlene, for that lovely introduction. I join you today from Wathaurong country in Geelong and I thank the Wathaurong people for their ongoing stewardship and care of these lands and waters and pay my deepest respects to their Elders past, present and emerging. I'm Merrin McCracken and I’ll be presenting today, representing our team. I have the great privilege of working at Deakin with the Disability Resource Centre, the Deakin Access and Inclusion Team. I'm really delighted that Dr Mary Dracup from Deakin Learning Futures who leads our inclusive ed project is here with us today and also Yas Mobayad who worked with us as research assistant on this project. Joanna Tai isn't able to be here today but you’ll see her Twitter handle at the base of some of our slides, if anyone wants to let her know how we’re going or keep in touch with her or make contact with her you’re welcome to use her Twitter handle. I want to do a quick correction. For people who were watching Sally Kift earlier, she mentioned we would be presenting the NCSEHE project on inclusive assessment and this isn’t that, but rather a pre‑cursor to that project. I want to take the opportunity today to present a story in two parts. So we have done some initial research into students' experience of assessment and adjustments, and what we can do to work towards inclusive solutions, and I'm going to present a summary of this research. I might speed through it a bit. It’s a presentation that Mary Dracup made to Deakin's teaching and learning team last week. But I also want to set this research in the context of the value for us as practitioners to really look for and find research opportunities and take that step from practice to evidence. So connecting the practice to the evidence. This has been a goal in my performance review for I reckon about ten years now and we've made successes along the way, but we’re really getting a bit of momentum now. This early research came about - not so much a chance conversation, but we were attending an inclusive ed community of practice that Mary had arranged. I was hosting it and Jo was there as a researcher from Cradle and the discussion was around assessment. We talked after the session about the potential of the database. I know that all of us in our field are looking for the perfect database. Ours isn't perfect, but by golly it's an improvement of what we had before. It has this amazing potential for us to pull out information about the sorts of adjustments that are in place for students. I guess our wish is to try and eliminate the adjustments one at a time as we replace them with inclusive practice but we use this database as the basis for the research. The other thing, I think, that's really fantastic about connecting practice to evidence is the value that the voice of the students that we work with can add to the research and the voice of our team members and also the value of that connection so that we can have influence in the direction of the research and really helping it affect our practice and the potency of this evidence, and I’ll talk a little bit more about that. But now onto the summary. So we know, why research into assessment adjustments and inclusive designs? Well, we know there are increasing numbers of students with a disability in higher ed. We're ethically and legally obliged to ensure students have the same opportunities to demonstrate achievement. Exams, quizzes, essays, group projects, oral presentations and placements are problematic for various students. Access plan adjustments are an individual ad hoc reactionary response and there is evidence that adjustments often don't address student needs and little evidence about how they actually do. And as was just mentioned previously, we know that many, many students choose not to share their condition and may not be getting the adjustments. So here's a little summary ‑ so the first full year of data that we had from our database was 2018 and we started this work in 2019, so we did some analysis of the 2018 DRC database. We aimed to understand the types and numbers of assessment adjustments we had at Deakin and most importantly to the aim of identifying future priorities for inclusive assessment design. So in 2018 we had 2,860 access plans and students and they were created across all levels of study and all faculties. 54% of students had registered with a mental health condition, 31% with a medical condition and 16% of these had registered with more than one condition. The adjustments ‑ and these will be very familiar to practitioners ‑ 72% had plans that requested the provision of additional time for assignments without the need of documentation and also many adjustments for exams, around 50% and 36% for online tests. Smaller numbers for adjustments relating to oral presentations, group work and lab reports, and I guess it's really interesting, the data really illuminates the patterns and current assessment practice and it indicates really those time contingent assessments are maybe the most significant barrier to inclusive assessment. So we had that analysis, we understood the numbers, but we wanted to know more so we did a survey of students and we wanted to know what are students’ experiences of assessment adjustments? What types of assessments suit the need of students with disabilities and which do not? And what kinds of feedback experiences support the learning of students with disabilities? Our method was an online survey sent to all returning DRC students. We didn’t send them to the first years. The survey was sent in April 2020. A tough time for students to be receiving a survey. We had open questions on the reasons for assessment adjustments, the types of adjustments, assessment methods in a unit that had supported or didn't support them. An assessment experience that elicited a lot of emotion and experiences of feedback. We had 38 responses and they were thematically analysed. We thematically analysed all the open question responses. We had ethics approval and I just note how great that is, in terms of being able to share the type of student voices and quotes. Something for us as practitioners to really learn. While it wasn't a large sample we were really surprised at how ‑ and it didn't need to be, because we were really looking for a qualitative study ‑ but there was a lot of alignment in the respondent similarities to the students who registered with us in the DRC and the analysis that we'd done previously. I'm not going to go through this, but there will be a report available before the end of the year I think that people will be able to access and there's a lot more detail there. But we had great responses across faculties and across different schools. Likewise, the conditions and adjustments that the students who responded to the survey discussed were very much also in line with those that were a part of our analysis. High numbers of students with an extension for a due date for an assessment, changed exam conditions and so on. I really want to get to some of our findings. There were a bunch of positive experiences around assignment extensions. I'll read a quote: "As the assignment due date loomed, I knew there was no way I would be able to have everything together in time. I contacted the teacher requesting an extension, and the two extra weekends they gave me alleviated all of that pressure and frustration." For many, an extension without additional documentation or the provision of one was all they needed and several said they'd only use it if they really needed it. They also acknowledge the downside of extensions, mainly that they could end up with a bottle neck or not receive formative feedback in time. Extensions help people to manage fluctuating conditions, hospitalisations, feeling overwhelmed, fatigued, caring responsibilities and grieving. I’ve heard the note on that and in talking about COVID at Deakin, and I'm sure across many universities, things were relaxed around extensions in trimester 1 and it just made a huge difference for students. Positive experiences about exam adjustments. “I also appreciate the longer exam time as it sometimes takes me a couple of goes of reading a question to understand what it wants and the extra time means I can complete the exam. In the past, before having the time extension I was unable to complete my exams. I have also appreciated being able to have breaks during my exam just to step out of the room to refresh and refocus and it not take away time”. There were a lot of positive comments about exam adjustments. There were some negative comments about exams generally, for example, that they encouraged a surface approach to learning, caused anxiety, didn't give formative feedback and didn't work for people with memory lapses or who had problems handwriting or using a keyboard for extended periods and digital accessibility of online exams was an issue for some too. There were some mixed experiences, particularly around teachers’ responses to requests. I’ve just skipped one, haven’t I? No. Sorry. This quote: "The coordinator emailed back saying that it was odd that I was asking for more time and saying that if I submitted my work in a week it might be marked. I found this really upsetting, mostly because I was feeling quite fragile at the time. I ended up dropping out of the unit. I think that if I'd been feeling better I would have coped with this response from the coordinator just fine, but at the time it was fairly overwhelming." This quote that sums up the feelings of many: "It can take a bit of courage to talk to the teacher about it." Thankfully some more positive mixed experiences: "I had a unit chair email me at the start of the trimester to say that he was reaching out to every student with a DRC plan. No‑one had ever reached out like that before. I remember this experience, as often it is already marginalising to have a chronic illness in its own right. I don't want everyone to know, but it's so nice to not have to explain yourself, something you already do in so many aspects of your life when you live with a chronic illness." Challenging types of assessment. Group work online, group work was often perceived as difficult and there were several comments about timelines slipping and communication difficulties, problems with social anxiety disclosure, fluctuating conditions and people's wish not to hold others back. One did mention that group work would also be very good for helping to build confidence, belonging and perspectives. So group work online, this quote: "Group work in an online environment is impossible at the best of times, let alone when you're dealing with a disability and invisible trauma that you don't necessarily wish to disclose to the group." And oral assessments: "Even though I have received special consideration in regards to my stutter it was still embarrassing to speak in front of peers. I would have preferred to have instead recorded my presentations." We asked people about, what are the characteristics of their preferred assessments and they told us about assessment sequencing. Smaller assessment tasks, directly linked to course work, involving formative feedback and for some, peer feedback. We talked about assessment choice. Choice of format, choice of topic. They talked about assessment formats that they preferred. Some preferred multiple choice. Practical, with feedback and opportunities to redo. And in the area of oral assessments, recording instead of live. Private, and signing up for particular time slots. So the provisional implications and this is where we mention that we have got the NCSEHE project underway, look out for it. Yeah. The feedback that we had, 150 responses in 2 days when we put the call out for people who were interested in sharing their experiences of exams in particular was an overwhelming response and happened later in the year. So, yeah, very interesting. But we are also spreading the word around Deakin that individual academics and the institution as a whole must continue to communicate clearly about and consider how assessments can accommodate the diverse range of student strengths. We need to work proactively with students to ensure appropriate adjustments are in place, where the assessment design cannot naturally accommodate diverse strengths. So that's the presentation that we're taking to teaching and learning and there'll be more recommendations to come, but just to finish up, I want to talk about the realisation of the value of the evidence to our practice. So just finding and talking the language of a broader audience and extending the reach of the message is so important. We know about assessments and the importance for inclusion but to be able to present these findings to Deakin learning and teaching conferences, Jo has presented to international assessment conferences, further plans to share in journals and beyond and the draft paper will be considered by the deputy vice‑chancellor of education as we plan for the student experience more broadly in 2021 and beyond. I've learnt a bit about research and how difficult ethics committees can be and met really lovely people with great skills and connections. So we couldn't have done this initial analysis. We could have done it ourselves but not as researched without Jo finding us some funding from a research centre at Deakin and then going on to look at the further opportunities through NCSEHE and so on. And we know the importance of that this but as Tom Tobin mentioned in his keynote, we need to consider ways of sharing the message and along with his suggestions I encourage us all to consider ways to grow the evidence and am really keen to link in with others in the sector. So thank you, Darlene. I may have rushed that a bit.

DARLENE: That’s absolutely wonderful. Thank you for that. I didn't even need to give you a 5‑minute time up. Your time management skills are wonderful. And, yep, can't wait for the next phase of this. It's going to be fantastic. I think, you know, Sally pre‑empting this, just because she's as excited as many of us are in the sector to see this research happening.

MERRIN: Terrific. Look, I know no time for questions, but if anyone does have any, please put them through. Mary and Yas and Jo and I will be very happy to discuss them and Darlene, suggestion without notice ‑ how about a community of practice and evidence people on the ADCET site. I'd love to hear what others are doing in this area.

DARLENE: That’s brilliant. No problem. Love the challenge. If people are keen to be involved in that, put it into the chatbox and we'll certainly call it out as well. So thank you so much, Merrin. Yes. Wonderful to hear from you.