DARLENE MCLENNAN: Okay. Thank you. Welcome, everybody. For those who don't know me, my name is Darlene McLennan, and I am the Manager of the Australian Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training. Really excited to welcome you all here today. Before we start, just to let you know this panel discussion is being live captioned and Auslan interpreted. To activate the captions, you can click on the CC button in the tool bar that is located either on the top or the bottom of your screen. We also have captions available in the browser, which we'll now add to the chat. So you can go into the browser if that's your preference.

With the Auslan interpreters, you should be able to hopefully pin the interpreters so you can keep them on your screen if you require them.

Okay. ADCET is hosted on lutruwita, Tasmanian Aboriginal land. And in the spirit of reconciliation, ADCET respectfully acknowledges the lutruwita nations and also recognises Aboriginal history and culture of the land, and I wish to pay my respects to Elders past and present and to the many Aboriginal people who did not make Elder status.

I also acknowledge all the countries participating in this meeting, and also acknowledge their Elders and ancestors and their legacy to us, and any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders participating in this session today. We invite you now to add your lands, if you wish, into the chat, which is something we've done for the last couple of years, if you'd like to acknowledge where you are from.

More housekeeping details. As I said, this webinar is being captioned by Sharon from Bradley Reporting and is being Auslan interpreted by Angela and Rebecca from Expressions Australia. We are recording this session and that will be available on ADCET in the coming days. If you are having any technical difficulties, you can email us at admin@adcet.edu.au. The panel discussion is set for around 90 minutes. We encourage participants to chat with each other, and if you can use the chat box to do that. If you can please remember to choose all panellists and attendees so everybody can read what you say. If you have a question for the panellist and we really are encouraging questions; that's the whole part of this, for you to question and think about needs based funding and the significant changes that are happening with the Accord then please add that to the Q&A box. I encourage you to use that box only for the Q&A and to please make them succinct, which will make my job easier. Sometimes people can write war and peace in that box and it makes it difficult for me to pull out the question. If you can please just refrain from that and just ask the question. That will be a delight for me and make my day a little bit easier.

Hopefully you all know where you are. A needs-based funding approach for students with disabilities, what are the opportunities and challenges. This session aims to help us reflect on the Accord and its recommendations. One of the key recommendations was an introduction of needs-based funding. The government put out a consultation paper around needs-based funding, and that consultation has closed, but in that paper, it actually identified that the government will consult separately with the sector and disability groups to determine appropriate eligibility settings and programs designed for students with disability.

So ADCET thought it was imperative we start the conversation with the sector so that we can start forming some views on how do we ensure that needs-based funding meets the needs of students with disability.

So we pulled a group of fabulous, wonderful people together who have lots to say about this issue, and now I'll just introduce each of them so they can tell you a little bit about themselves and where they're coming from. So first I'll go to you, Andrew.

ANDREW NORTON: I'm Andrew Norton, currently a Professor in the Practice of Higher Education Policy at the Australian National University, and I've spent about 25 years in higher education policy now.

DARLENE: Great. Thank you. Cathy.

CATHY EASTE: Hi, I'm Cathy Easte. I'm the Manager of Student Disability Accessibility at Griffith University here in Brisbane. I'm also the President of the Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability. I'm also deaf and have lived experience, and I've worked in the sector from TAFE, high schools, universities for well over 35 years.

DARLENE: Thank you, Cathy. Ebe.

EBE GANON: Hi everyone. My name is Ebe. I'm currently a Masters student in disability and inclusion at Deakin University. I also have experience of being a professional staff member and a sessional academic at a range of different universities around Australia. I'm also the Deputy Chair of Children and Young People with Disability Australia which is the national peak body which represents people aged zero to 25 with disability.

DARLENE: Thanks, Ebe. Matt.

MATT BRETT: G'day, everyone. Matt Brett, I'm the Director of Academic Governance and Standards at Deakin University. I've had an exposure to disability in higher ed. I started my time in higher ed back in the mid 90s as a sign language interpreter, so it's great to see interpreters here today and things are being captioned. I'm a CODA, so child of deaf adults. I've had exposure to this my entire life, so delighted to be here today. Thank you.

DARLENE: Thanks, Matt. Nadine.

NADINE ZACHARIAS: Hello, everyone. Nadine Zacharias. I'm the Managing Director and Founder of a specialist consulting company called Equity by Design. Before that, I had Director level roles at Swinburne and Deakin, and in both roles had responsibility for the disability service or the accessibility team respectively.

DARLENE: Thank you. And finally, Yvonne.

YVONNE ROLLEY: Hi. I'm Yvonne Rolley. I'm currently Manager of Student Equity and Disability at the University of Melbourne. I've had over 30 years' experience in higher education managing Student Services, including accessibility and inclusion.

DARLENE: Okay. Thank you. What a fabulous group we've compiled today. So thank you. So I've got a few questions that I want to ask the panellists. As I said, we really are going to be encouraging all of you to ask questions as well. But just to start us off, I will ask a few and then we will call for audience questions.

So the first question, and just talking prior we were thinking Andrew could answer this first and then I'll go to each of the panel members, but the first question is what should government consider when developing a needs-based funding model for students? I'll throw to you, Andrew.

ANDREW: It sounds kind of obvious to say it but the answer is needs. So my criticism of the discussion paper that came out which was not about disability, it was about the other equity groups was that, really, it was using membership off the equity group as a proxy for need, rather than actually looking at the needs of students more generally. The only actual example it gave of need was ATAR as a measure of academic need but they seem to be using that to reduce funding for people who have higher ATARs, rather than try and extend it to a wider range of people who might have academic preparation issues.

And so if this is going to be the thing for disability as well. I think we're off to a bad conceptual start. Needs based funding should be about needs. Thanks, Darlene.

DARLENE: Thank you. I might throw to you next, Ebe.

EBE: Thanks, Darlene. Yeah. I think similarly to Andrew when I saw the consultation paper come out that I guess outlines the broad principles of what this framework might look like I sighed a bit, because in my view I feel like what we might be looking at here is a continuation of the existing problem where universities are not well resourced or well incentivised to do the systemic and cultural change work that we actually need to improve the barriers that face students who have been historically underserved by these institutions.

Universities were designed by people and groups who have traditionally been really well served by large institutions and not by those who have been identified as priority cohorts for reasons due to disability or socioeconomic status or the full gamut of groups that have been targeted by these reforms.

It's really important that as we move into this new model that this systemic change, so the changes to the attitudes, the ways that we work in universities, isn't deprioritised. You know, I wonder if this sort of individual needs based funding model continues to incentivise this individual programs and individual adjustments based approach which isn't very efficient, doesn't give us access to the economies of scale when you fix a problem for a whole group, rather than just targeting a solution at an individual.

So we need to make sure that alongside this model, which it looks like we're going down this path, that we're not disincentivising that system's work. And also, that we're not locking out other students who don't fall into these identified priority cohorts who do actually have needs for support. When you look at the list of priority groups, there's a lot of attributes that perhaps we might expect to see on that list but we don't. So alongside the development of this model, we just need to think about the other policy levers and the other incentives that we need to set up to make sure that we actually achieve real equity for students, not just a slightly different bureaucratic way of allocating money.

DARLENE: Thanks, Ebe. Now, the order I'm going in at the moment is the order of my screen. There's no priority system here. Cathy, you're next on my screen.

CATHY: Thanks, Darlene. Like Andrew said, it has to be about needs, and who determines those needs? What are those needs? Right. I get really fed up with a lot of decisions being made about what is reasonable or what is appropriate, and what support must be provided when it's decided by people who do not have disabilities. When it's decided by people who have the advantage of accessing a system and not talking to those people who cannot access a system because it's not accessible. You know, nothing about us, without us, or nothing about us unless it's led by us should be paramount to determining what needs are. What's happening at the moment with the NDIS funding is actually deplorable and, you know, determining of needs by bureaucrats, or so forth. What's happening in universities at the moment and our institutions are challenged with money. And, yes, I understand the institutions are challenged with money, with not having international students and therefore having less money, but that's flowing down the chain and we have less staff, and universities are looking for ways to save money.

So I think, you know, we need to needs-based funding has to be really about what are the full needs. If those needs are to look at how we can build the pathway for you to actually enter this level of education, that needs to be a need that is also included. Those pathways models need to be included. If that need is for you to just do a few courses and audit courses, then that needs to be a need that's funded. There's zero funding for that at the moment. There's people with disabilities who need that to be able to go on to set up their own business, and so forth.

So the determining of what is a need needs to include the voice of people with disabilities.

DARLENE: Thanks, Cathy. Yvonne.

YVONNE: I feel like I need to say all of the above, everyone who has spoken. One of the things I would say that I don't feel it addresses some of the accumulative disadvantage that students have. Often the students will be members of a number of different equity groups, not just one, so it's a little bit linear.

The other issues I'd be saying is that it only appears to be only addressing undergraduate and not postgraduate study, and I think there's real space for being able to support services and the very growing need in that post graduate space. So I think it leads to a significant disadvantage for students who are aspirational who would like to go on to study post graduate and face all the same barriers they would have had undergraduate.

It doesn't just end at their undergraduate completion, which also then has longer term impact in terms of employability and the impact on professions. So there's real opportunity to address some of the barriers for graduates who then go on to professions, increase diversity in terms of employment.

DARLENE: Thanks, Yvonne. Nadine.

NADINE: Thank you, all. Into a slightly different vein for me. So if you step back and you look at the six national equity groups and the growth in the equity groups, disability is the absolute standout. So we have over 110,000 students with disability who have identified as having a disability in the system in 2022. You know that these numbers have a bit of a lag. There's 10% of the domestic cohort across undergrad and post grad. It was already on an increase when we got a change in the definition of disability with the introduction of the taxi system, when mental health conditions and neurological conditions, among other things, were included in the definition, so that has really supercharged the numbers, which is quite different to some of the other equity groups.

So some of the institutions have doubled and tripled their numbers of students with disability and that is creating, I guess, an institutional context where going, following what Ebe raised, is we cannot solve this anymore on a case-by-case basis. We really need to get our head around systemic solutions. Some really good work is being done in that space, and I point to the work that, you know, like Darlene and Matt were both involved in that was led by Tim Pitman which looked at the funding of disability support in universities, and also the great work that was done by Joanna Tay and colleagues at Deakin that looked at assessment. And they really called out that we cannot have a system that focuses only on reactive adjustments. We need to proactively design for inclusion.

And I guess that is a real policy imperative here. We cannot just look at you know, like fixing individual making individual adjustments but we have to look at the systemic issue. But I think the tension there is also we know the practitioners so Yvonne, Cathy absolutely are at the frontline of this. We know that to support some students, particularly those who have disability and other complex needs, will require a level of individual adjustments. Some of them can be quite expensive, and so I think there is also a need to really look at, you know, like high cost adjustments where there is a risk that institutions might discriminate against high cost students. And there needs to be support from the Commonwealth to prevent that.

It leads me to the final thing I'd like to say at the highest level. For students with a disability, unlike some of the other equity groups, there is a legislative instrument and recourse through the state based and through the Australian Human Rights Commission. So it has a different level of teeth, if you may, compared to some of the other equity groups that we are dealing with, and through the NDIS, through the Royal Commission we now have a community who is very alive to their rights, who is very organised and coordinated and has had challenges with big institutions for a while, and universities have no ground to stand on to say, we will not make a particular adjustment because they're regarded as large institutions. You know, like many billion-dollar institutions. So universities really don't have a strong defence to say, "we will not make a particular adjustment for students with a disability", to which they have a legislated right.

So I think there's some really interesting tensions in this space, and I'm actually pleased and commend the government that they pulled out students with disability and gave that a particular or like its own consultation process, because I think it's absolutely warranted. It is a complex space. Not saying that the others aren't complex but there's another layer in this conversation that deserves its own process.

DARLENE: Thanks, Nadine. Fabulous. And finally, Matt.

MATT: Saving the worst till last, as they say, and what a tough act to follow with such insightful comments from other members of the panel. I might pick up where Nadine left off, just around the sort of process, and commending the government for putting a spotlight on this as an issue. I think for a long-time disability has perhaps been the ignored or poor family member of equity groups, and maybe hasn't got the kind of attention that it warrants or deserves.

So there's a real tremendous opportunity here if the government can get this right to have a really kind of positive impact on the experiences of students with disabilities in Australian higher education and tertiary education.

I think the change here is from what we've got currently. We've had it in place for close to 20 years, I think, which is the reimbursement model for universities. Actually transitioning to a loading where there is an imperfect and maybe imprecise proxy measure that might fund demand in a more scalable way, which I think is important, and there may well be ways of being able to deal with systemic structural barriers that have been pointed to by various sort of panellists, if that can be designed in the right way.

To the specific question around what the government should be considering, Nadine has done a bit of a shout out to Tim and myself and others, Darlene, for some of the work I do a kind of shout out for Nadine, because did a piece called The Best Chance For All, which I still think is a really solid piece of work. I think the relevance for that in this context is that we should be thinking about the long term prosperity of the country and the aspirations of students themselves and making sure that whatever we put in place, it has a positive contribution for students being able to fulfil their potential and, by fulfilling their potential, contribute to Australia's prosperity and a vibrant, healthy, thriving democracy.

So there's a lot of good work to do there, and I think this is a really, really important mechanism, if they get it right, that can play a really outsized part in making that happen.

DARLENE: That's great. Thanks, Matt. And thank you, everybody, for the chat. Just some of the chat, kind of reaffirming what the panellists are saying. Building inclusion to all students and all aspects of the student experience. Also talking about that the proactive, not just the reactive inclusion, which is really important. Christine stated, "We need transformative policies rather than relying on affirmative strategies."

And somebody's also commented on your conversation, Nadine, around increasing the agency of teaching staff so they are better prepared and aware. Elizabeth said, "It benefits the students but also benefits the whole community when we actually do this work." So it's great to keep that conversation going. Please keep your thoughts coming up because we will also collate them and provide them at the end as well.

I also encourage panellists to ask each other questions too. I'm facilitating, but I'm also wanting to have a conversation, not just that we're speaking to you. But we have got some set questions, and we're now moving into the set questions for each of the panellists that I've kind of nutted out. But once again, if any panellists want to ask for further information, please put up your hand, and then I'll also check the Q&A box after each person speaks.

So the first question is for Andrew. He's very lucky. He's got to go first twice. So Andrew, how do you think a needs-based funding model would impact the overall policy landscape of higher education Australia? Yeah. So around disability, but also all students we identified as well.

ANDREW: Yeah. So I think potentially this is a big conceptual change, but it remains to be seen if in practice it is one. So as most of you would be aware, the vast bulk of funding for students comes via the Commonwealth grant scheme, the Commonwealth contributions, and that is linked to the course the student is doing, rather than any personal characteristic of the student.

So I think one of the most interesting ideas to come out of Accord is this idea that student characteristics, as well as course characteristics, have a big impact on the whole higher education system and the amount of support that different students are going to need.

Parallel with that, we've had these various grants for particular groups. Generally with fairly detailed prescriptiveness on how the money could be used, high acquittal costs. I think this is where the current needs-based model is going wrong. So really, it should be closer to what we have the current teaching grants, which mean that the universities have a high degree of flexibility in exactly how they go about it. So the way I'm reading the existing or the consultation paper that we had on the other equity groups, it's still kind of like HEPPP, where it's confined to niche projects which are very specific to the equity group in question. Rather than doing things and this is what people have been saying already that are built into the core of the institution, sort of delivered in parallel with everything else the institution is doing, which I think could be a more efficient way of doing at scale with issues that the equity groups are facing, as well as issues that many other students face, without the need to necessarily always identify someone as being in an equity group.

So I think one of the struggles here, we sort of pull the department away from this idea that this narrow that there's assistive services and this is actually a broader thing for the entire university and how it delivers to all its students.

DARLENE: Thanks, Andrew. Are you seeing like, it's interesting what this does in culturally changing. Are you seeing universities pivot or culturally change in relation to the Accord and the needs-based funding proposals?

ANDREW: I think we need to wait to see the money.

DARLENE: Okay.

ANDREW: Universities are historically responsive to the funding incentives. Look what the department is doing. The people who have been asked to write this are people who have been doing equity policy historically. They're naturally going to turn to the things they've already been doing, rather than trying to think more broadly, which is quite possibly what the Accord report wanted them to do, but that's a big conceptual leap for them to make.

DARLENE: Any panellists want to ask Andrew a question? There's no Q&A at the moment. No? You're let off lightly, Andrew. Well done.

So the next one we've got for the practitioners in the room, Cathy and Yvonne, I might start with you, Cathy, to answer this and then move on to Yvonne. When we're looking at the needs based funding and the needs, as Andrew said rightly at the beginning, looking at the challenges that are faced by students with disability accessing higher education, so what do you think are the most significant challenges faced by students and that maybe the needs based funding may address, hypothetically?

CATHY: Hypothetically if we're looking at actual needs, then you're actually looking at what students need. So therefore, if we have a student with a disability who needs tutoring support to bridge any educational gaps that may have been in their education before arriving at university, we can provide this additional support. If we have a student who needs to spend quite a lot of hours learning assistive tech, then we can provide this support. At the moment this sort of support is really ad hoc and we don't necessarily have funding to provide the supports to enable the student to be successful.

So with assistive tech, for example, students should be able to access that training support before they start their degree, not have to wait till they enrol in a program and say, "Look, I need to learn, you know, Jaws, or I need to learn Read and Write Gold to be able to be successful with my studies."

At the moment, I have blind students who had been blind later in life, and they don't know how to use screen readers. And they enrol in study and have to learn how to use a screen reader while they're studying. It's a double load. It's too much. They should be able to access that support before they start their study.

And, yes, not everybody is on NDIS, or so forth, so they don't have plans they can use elsewhere to access that type of support. We need to be able to set our students up for success and look at their actual needs. And sometimes their needs need to be addressed before they enrol in a course. And it's that preparation for a course, if we're looking at actual need, will address student success. Many students come to university really unprepared. All right. It's not their fault. It's just the system and how it's set up and they're not prepared for success.

They need all of these additional supports. They have to enrol in a minimum of three subjects because lo and behold most of our students are not on the disability support pension and, therefore, have to enrol in a minimal amount to get student dollars, and plus work, and it's just too much. It's too much for students. We need to be able to support them before they arrive, when they arrive and look at all of their needs.

If they need tutoring, if they need more one on one, we need to be able to provide that.

DARLENE: Thanks, Cathy. It was interesting reading the document, the consultation paper, and I think there was a question in regards to the transition support, you know, how can needs based funding support the transition support and also graduate outcomes, and I was thinking, "Oh my gosh, it's going to try to do so much", which was a worry in itself. But I think it's quite reflective that, you know, sometimes the priority cohorts are identifying don't necessarily have the capital behind them to understand study and the requirement and, you know, yeah, the need to get more information. To skill up in regards to technology is one of those. Nadine, did you want to add to this conversation?

NADINE: No, I want to ask something. Cathy, leave yourself unmuted. Time together, like Andrew has talked about. How do we identify need, and Cathy's reminder that students come in with different levels of preparedness. You know, like to work with their disability in the context of higher education study, Cathy, do you have a view on how we do that needs assessment as students come in? Can we do that better?

CATHY: We can do it better and we do need to we need to find a way to do that. At the moment, no assessment is made until they enrol and they talk to some expert. And hopefully they do talk to some expert in some university. There's not experts in all universities, et cetera. So they don't necessarily know until they actually enrol, and that's too late. And I think we need to start addressing before enrolment.

Like, I actually today have a program on my campus that says tertiary education experience. I spend all morning talking to parents about, you know, what they can do to prepare students to come to university. And to make sure they talk to us at least six months out so we can look at what can happen beforehand.

But those linkages, there needs to be support for transition. Victoria this year has started what do they call transitions officers or something in TAFE. They're starting to look at that because they know that transition from one education setting into another needs to be addressed. Whether it's from school to TAFE, to TAFE to university, all of that needs to be we lost it when we lost all the NDCOs, et cetera, and we need to have that transition. We need to and there needs to be expert teams within that sort of environment to look at what that student needs, and to be able to link into some funding for that.

Because if there's no funding for that, there's no funding to learn English before you go on to TAFE, then many deaf people don't, for example, because their English skills are not at that level. So if they can't and TAFE aren't running general English classes, et cetera. So how does that go? There's also other argument in terms of and this is with VET, with a lot of intellectual disabilities not doing certificate, and not being able to do certain certificate level courses because they're all taught in schools. And if you are an older person or individual, you can't go back and enrol in high school to access a lower-level certificate to progress up, if that's what you need.

So we need to look at the whole picture, and there needs to be a really detailed discussion as to what's needed and how we can address those needs because there are needs out there.

NADINE: Thank you.

DARLENE: Thank you. Thanks, Cathy. Yvonne, did you want to comment on that question?

YVONNE: Probably the thing I would say is that a really significant issue is about the underreporting currently in universities, and obviously the data shows a lot of research has been done. Many on the panel have done the research about the percentage of students who do have disability who do not disclose. There's a number of reasons why students may not disclose a disability, particularly in the growing areas of mental health and neurodiversity. Part of that is related to stigma but it's also related to concern around impact on their future employability in particular professions and disclosing, and it's quite complex.

That means that there really is a significant need for developing systems and supporting teaching and learning and creative ways for education and methods that can address all students, and the need to be able to address students who may not necessarily ever identify personally to any of the services, for example.

So there needs to be, not just a linear approach to how to educate, you know, how to provide service, and how we see the term and what service means.

The other bit that I would say that's really significant is we talk about transition. So not only looking at the transition in, but once we have recruited students and actively you know, universities are actively, and there's incentives to recruit students with disability under this approach. However, the concern I have is around what we're promising students, and having expectations raised about their future post their education. And some of the data which I'm not sure is actually being matched with employability statistics, but the burden that students with disability may well be carrying in terms of student debt once they leave university. There's going to be a disproportionate burden on that group because they're underemployed, we already know that, and often they're studying for a longer period of time.

So I think really looking at a much bigger picture of what as a community we're doing in terms of opportunity post university. And I think it's a really significant issue to address not just to get students in to support them, promise everything and then possibly find the outcome is not as equitable as we think. You know, their disability needs don't end with leaving university. So, yeah, that would be probably what I'd add what we could do in that space.

DARLENE: Thank you, Yvonne. It is a challenge, because it's kind of that whole you know, the graduate, there's so much under the surface. The whole gamut of the student life journey is quite huge, and what and when does funding start and stop and what are the levers we do to ensure universities at each of those points are responsive.

YVONNE: Can I just add that I think the commonality of what everyone is saying is that there needs to be a systemic approach, not a linear approach to all of this.

DARLENE: Definitely. That might be a good time to move to Ebe. Cathy started off with the statement of nothing about us, without us, and that it's really important that a needs initiative, there's consultation but also being led by people with a disability.

So we've got a question around how the student voices could be centred in the development of the equity and accessibility policies under a needs-based framework. Your thoughts around that?

EBE: Yeah. I've got a couple of suggestions around this. I think the first one is please don't lock us into these fabricated equity groups. I know it's very convenient for the sake of policy language to describe us like this, but it's not particularly accurate, and it's also not very strengths based. What we've created here is a policy setting that defines groups as a result of, you know, effectively individual factors that, you know, I guess, the assumption is that they predispose us to, you know, lower academic preparedness or needing more support, which in many cases is true.

But it locates the problems with us as individuals rather than at the feet of the institutions that have built themselves in ways that are not accessible to us. The other challenge with using this terminology like around the equity groups is that there's a lot of attributes that are missing from these equity groups that we might think could potentially indicate need.

International students are a cohort that experience really huge challenges around cost of living, around mental health, around transitioning into new cultures, but they're invisible in this framework. Refugee students who don't hit another one of the equity cohorts who experience very significant barriers to transitioning into, you know, Australian tertiary education, and that can have really huge impacts for the way that they create a new life here. Queer students is another one that's hugely missing and absent from this whole dialogue. My own personal experience, the intersection between my queer experience and one as a student with a disability. The compounding, I suppose, marginalisation I experienced from institutions that have been built by a heteronormative and able norm is huge, but my queer experience seems to be missing from the conversation around the way that we support students within a needs-based funding framework or within higher education more generally.

The second one which is sort of linked to that is don't assume that we don't know what we need or that we're passive. For a lot of us, we've been navigating supports for our whole lives. We've been self-advocating for many, many years. It's not the case for everybody, for a range of reasons, but for a lot of us we know exactly what we need, but the fact is many students are approaching student supports and they're reaching out for help and they're being told either that they're wrong and they don't know what they're asking for, or that it's not reasonable and that there's no money to get them what they need.

I think that dynamic of expert versus student really needs to shift in this space and we really need to look at this as a partnership between students and practitioners working together with teaching staff to be able to provide solutions that really work. That involves evaluating those solutions; looking at what the actual impact of offering these supports and adjustments are. And then speaking to one of the questions that's dropped into the Q&A, looking at where those solutions are common across large groups of students from a universal design perspective. Where can we lift things up from being, you know, individual responsibilities? For example, in the Q&A is a teaching staff member talking about the fact that they spend a really long time, you know, captioning and making all of their content accessible. When does that actually become an institutional responsibility to build in the capability to do that systemically, rather than this being an individual solution?

The third one I would suggest, in terms of centring student voice, is when institutions like universities and government are working with students, they need to be very transparent about what they're asking for and what the actual impact of that consultation can be. We've all, I'm sure, had experiences of being asked for the feedback but the decision has already been made. That doesn't work and we see right through that. Please don't do that. Only ask the question if there is a potential that the feedback being given can make a change.

My research in my Masters at the moment is looking at the experiences of students with disability who engage in student disability collectives, which is one particular type of student representative mechanism or student voice mechanism, among many other things and functions that those groups have. And one of the things that we find there is that the students who are speaking up and giving suggestions and really trying to be solutions minded with institutions, is that they are spread very, very thin. They have lots of competing demands for their time. They're hugely undercompensated for the work that they do. So please don't ask us to input on things when there's no chance that it's going to change. Please don't waste our time.

The last one is accessibility. A really good example of why accessibility is important when we're elevating the student voice is potentially the needs-based funding consultation paper itself. Now, I'm a policy nerd or a developing policy nerd, so when I read those papers, I'm having a great time. I'm getting into it. I'm cross referencing with previous pieces of policy that I know about, and Googling aggressively and using ChatGPT to summarise and rephrase, and things like that. I understand that's not everyone, and it's certainly not all students, especially when we're really time poor. And producing consultation papers like that, which are flat PDFs which are not tagged, without producing Word doc alternatives for people who are using AT can engage with them, with missing image descriptions in language that's incredibly dense and requires a significant amount of prior knowledge about these policies, is really not a great way to encourage students to engage in these policy discussions because ultimately it's us who these are going to impact. If we can't even get through the front door to participate in the consultation, then I'm not sure how we think that we're going to elevate the student voice. It's really simple.

DARLENE: Thank you, Ebe. There's so much to unpack in all that conversation, and I think you can see that the love is coming in with the claps and the love hearts. There's a few questions I want to ask but I will continue on with asking the other questions and come back to that because, yeah, as I said, so much you said, so that's fabulous. Thank you.

Nadine, I'm just going to move on to some of the other funding that we've had previously, or currently, that currently exists are the program such as the Disability Support Program and the Higher Education Partnership I got my three P's wrong. Anyway, the Higher Education Partnership Program I'm missing a P.

NADINE: Participation and partnership.

DARLENE: That's it. So what are the lessons that you think we've learnt from those programs and how can we make use of those lessons to make future programs better to support the underrepresented groups to access education?

NADINE: Yep. Just wanted to say, Ebe, please keep that policy nerd going. You are making such a contribution. It is delightful. Every time I'm in a conversation with Ebe I learn tonnes, and you put it so succinctly. It's beautiful. Just keep this going.

Picking up on what Andrew said, though, on the programs, you know, like the people that are writing the new policies at the moment are usually the people who wrote the previous policies and they are continuing on a similar logic. But sometimes, you know, chopping off the good bits from the programs that exist to create something new that is maybe not quite as fit for purpose as the previous iteration. So what we can say about both the DSP and HEPPP is that there's no correlation between funding and performance, which is a bit depressing, which means that institutions that have got the most funding didn't necessarily have the best performance. For students with disability retention and completion outcomes mirror the general academic profile of the student cohort. So students with disability in a group of eight institutions have a better outcome in terms of retention and completion than other institutions, and also outcomes vary significantly across different institution types. So it's always sort of bedevilled us that we can't really put a clear link between amount of funding and uplift in performance.

Then we go to what is the purpose of this program? What's the problem we're trying to fix? And I totally get Ebe's point about, you know, like the built-in deficit perspective in the equity groups. The shift we need to make here is to say the institution is the problem and the more diverse our student cohorts become, the more obvious it becomes and it's really the institutions that need to put the spotlight on themselves. The question then becomes how do we use the programs for which the Federal Government gives us money, to do that, to turn the spotlight. And to what extent can these programs and the type of funding the universities receive at least contribute to the solution while not entirely fixing the problem.

So, again, if we look at the DSP, and the DSP is small, it's $60 million in this budget, the 2024 2025 budget. For context, the LCFs, of which HEPPP is the largest component, has $283 million, so the DSP is the minion amongst the funding of the Commonwealth. The purpose is to assist higher education providers with supporting students with disability. So, again, it is very moderate in what it's aiming to do. It's allocated by formula, the bulk of the funding, and then with a level of reimbursement to providers for equipment and direct supports that are high cost.

So, again, in terms of the structure, I guess, you know, like there is it's not a terrible model, in that we are saying there needs to be an infrastructure, base level infrastructure that is funded for each university, so there needs to be the specialists who provide the direct student facing support, and there needs to be a provision for the really high cost adjustments that universities make. But there's also, I would argue, particularly in that aspiration and ambition by universities to create more inclusive practice. There's a whole new class of staff that need to come online, and they're usually third space practitioners. They're usually in the intersection between the teaching and learning endeavour and the student support endeavour, and they need to have a concept of policy and process as well. And they are people like learning designers. You know, like in many universities that work with academic colleagues to implement things like universal design for learning, principles in course design, that work with course teams to look at how we scaffold, you know, transition, assessment, learning across Accords. This is where the differences are going to be made.

At Deakin, again, there were specialist personnel that looked at the accessibility of documents and systems and processes. That is the missing piece. So that is where some of the incentivisation could happen from a programming perspective, to say there's a base level infrastructure, there's a high need adjustments, and then there is a third layer of specialists that don't necessarily exist everywhere but they can really shift the practice and the inclusiveness of BAU. So that, I think, if we could get something like that into the new program and policy approach, that would be quite amazing.

DARLENE: Yep. Thanks, Nadine. Yvonne, you did put your hand up. Did you want to you're on mute, so just unmute.

YVONNE: Yes. I just wanted to add to what Nadine was saying. Totally agree with what you're saying, and it's really interesting one of the things I've noticed over a couple of universities is the issue around the incentive for the academics to be able to do the uplift. So it's not so much that they don't have capacity to do that or develop it, but it certainly comes down to almost an industrial issue in terms of whether it's perceived as being part of their role.

And one of the things it relates to is the formula that's applied to remuneration for academics. And I think that's one of the things that needs to be addressed at each institution to be really looking at rather than being able to make all these developments and change as being a burden and many academics will express that to practitioners on a daily basis, that it's not their job and that they're there to be doing whatever and I think also what happens in a number of the institutions which are research led institutions, so remuneration is based on a formula related to publication and research and not necessarily teaching.

So I think unpacking how academics are remunerated and what incentives can be built in to encourage some of the things that you're suggesting would be really helpful.

NADINE: Agreed. But I think what is really powerful is processes. And what really shifted the conversation at Deakin was a consideration of UDL principles was written into the major course review process. And so all of a sudden, the people who were the specialists, who could provide that support, turned from being an annoying person who tried to get in with individual academics, to a resource to the course team in redesigning their program. Right. So I think that they are the shifts. But it took four years to make it happen. So persistence is a virtue in that situation, but I think processes can really help us in that space.

DARLENE: Thank you, Nadine. Cathy, did you want to add to this?

CATHY: Yeah. I just think it's really important to remember that while universal design and forcing academics to lift their game, and to be more accessible and more inclusive, and that needs training, all of those sort of things, and we need to invest time in our academic staff and with processes and training awareness, changing that culture. But universal design is only going to solve about 20% of what I spend in my high needs cost.

So it's just a lot of talk that "this is the way forward", et cetera and, yes, it is, and I don't dispute that but it takes up more of the conversation time than an actual real needs cost, which is more people based. Like, you cannot have an interpreter sit in every class just in case a deaf person enrols, et cetera, or caption real time caption every class just in case a deaf person enrols.

I had my executive question our submission because the government questioned it, of course. "Oh, you spent $96,000 on one deaf student. Can you explain why?" "Yeah, he's deaf. Do I need to explain more?" Like, it's a massive cost. And this was an oral deaf student, not even an Auslan signing deaf student, but we needed to provide real time captioning for his classes. So I had to go through all of this with the real time captioning of his in person tutorials, et cetera, the real time captioning of his lectures and then we only had to pay $500 to convert his lecture recording to being captioned he can review because we'd already spent the other money. But it's just having to justify that.

Then the executive come back, "Oh, that's a lot of money to spend on deaf people. Maybe AI can help solve it in the future." AI won't solve a lot of our issues, right? I think eventually AI may improve in captioning but it's not going to solve everything. And these high-cost needs, they need to be part of that discussion because we've had universities in Australia in Managers' meetings saying, "We don't like accepting deaf students because we know they're going to cost a lot of money." And I guarantee all of my high need cost students are deaf or hard of hearing.

DARLENE: Yep. And that is one of the challenges, and I think that's one of the concerns we have raised, in that will barriers be put up? This is the concern if there's part of the argument around continuing the disability support program was it's kind of a lever for us to say there is some reimbursement. I've always used the analogy of universities can easily put steps up to ensure people with disability are excluded from institutions because they know they're going to cost money, so it's a lever we've used, but it's a blunt lever, in some ways, and it's not always effective. So I think we need to be really careful when we look at what will the disability support program be, what will a needs-based funding be, and how do we ensure people with disabilities are able to choose where they go to. Sorry, Cathy, yes.

CATHY: And that's true, but for students to be able to choose and make that choice, we also need to look at that wider picture. We need to train staff to work in our institutions. Auslan interpreters are not automatically trained and skilled to be an interpreter in a higher education lecture. That's additional. We need to train captioners. Australia has zero captioning educational captioning program. Zero. They have whole degrees overseas for that. We have nothing here that trains and prepare our staff to work in our institutions as well. So if we want more students to come, we have to be better prepared to support them as well.

DARLENE: Definitely. I think often when we asked you, Yvonne and Cathy, around what are some of the barriers that exist, there are so many barriers. I think at one point the National Disability Coordinators Officers Program wrote a barrier piece and it was 380 just the first just what are some of the challenges that institutions have put up that people with disability have experienced because of the institutional approach.

Matt, we can't not have a conversation around the framework and the regulative requirements that currently the university sector are in, you know, it's probably where we're wanting to end this formal part of the panel discussion before we moved on to questions from the audience. So to what extent do the higher education standards framework and the disability education the standards for education and other regulatory requirements already require institutions to understand and meet the needs of students with disability?

MATT: Thanks, Darlene. This is where everyone can nerd out on policy and detail because I might be talking abstract along those lines. It's one that's really interesting. We've been hearing on a range of fronts that the need to provide reasonable adjustments to put in place additional services, et cetera, which in many respects are kind of bandaids or compensation for the lack of inclusive education structures in the first place.

And I take Cathy's point, yes, some students are going to need some kind of adjustment. That's just part and parcel of the nature of their experience. But for the most part, what we're dealing with is trying to provide ways of supporting needs of students whose needs have not been met by the core fundamental structures of higher education.

I'll remind people here and I'm just going to read from legislation this is total nerd out policy time: "It is unlawful for an education provider to discriminate against a person on the grounds of a person's disability by developing curricula or training courses, having a content that will either exclude the person from participation or subject the person to any other detriment."

So we've got a pretty strong requirement in the DDA that sort of says course accreditation needs to be inclusive, should not be exclusionary in various ways. We do it all the time. I just sat in a Core Standards Committee meeting at Deakin for two and a half hours going through the details of all these courses. And I think Deakin does pretty well in this space, but there are still tremendous gaps in the way we give sufficient attention to the extent to which our curriculum is inclusive of people with disabilities. That's point one. There was a point in the Q&A before around what might be done to be able to potentially free up academic's time, or get them engaged in this space.

And I'm just going to keep that as a bit of a reference point, but maybe think about the most exclusionary courses in Australian higher education, which is medicine and the journey that we've gone on over the last 20 years. So DDA Disability Standards for Education, DSE, came in 2005 and that really sharpened our focus, in some respects, around the need to provide reasonable adjustment, but it also affirmed and legitimised universities having exclusionary practices in their courses if it upheld the expectations of having an award conferred in that particular degree.

And around that time we would have seen inherent requirement statements take off across the sector, and medicine was one of those courses that was quick out of the gate, so to speak, to sort of put up the gate to say, "We've got standards here and we want to make sure we're not letting people in, so to speak". But over time, things are changing. And the reason I'm invoking this is not only because Laura posed the question in the Q&A and she's been doing some good work in this space, but it draws attention to the relationship between money and standards and support.

Medicine is funded to a level which is much higher than other courses in the sector, and so they've been able to invest. And so there's now guidelines from the Australian New Zealand Council of Medical Deans I think I've got that right around inclusion for students with disability. So it's not perfect, but it shows if you've got the money and the will, you can actually do some really good investment around making sure the curriculum development and the way in which it's implemented is being as inclusive as it can be.

There's subsequent work underway to refine and enhance the guidance around that kind of work. If we've got the money available and you've got the right people and when I say, "right people", I think it's a partnership between the academics and, potentially, disability practitioners that have expertise in this space, one can do incredible things. I think this is where needs-based funding is a real opportunity. If the settings of that are right, we might be able to get into some deep core structures of universities around course design and curriculum design, learning design delivery, that brings together the right people to make it as inclusive as possible to really meet students' needs so they can thrive and get a greater education and go on and do great things in their career. Right now we don't have that.

Policies particularly embedded in the Disability Discrimination Act push us towards reasonable adjustment. And a really good set of papers from Elizabeth Dixon in a recent special edition of The Australian Journal of Education that really, to my mind, pulls apart and picks apart the DDA and some of its flaws in education, which I think is a really good reminder of just what we're dealing with.

But everything pushes us towards reasonable adjustment, so it's much, much harder to get the structural details dealt with effectively. And the funding, the additional support for students with a disability, or the DSP, has never funded academics to invest a bit of time to make sure their curriculum can be effective, but maybe with needs based funding there's an opportunity to ensure we are funding the time, that we are getting the people around the table to make sure things are designed in the right way and that we can maybe transcend some of the deep structural flaws in some of our policies that relate to disability in Australian higher education.

A bit of a shout out to Yvonne's point before as well around making sure that academic time, workload, industrial are supporting this kind of thing because right now research citations are the driver and it's not necessarily enabling or rewarding or celebrating or promoting staff on the basis of their innovation around inclusive practice. That's the kind of stuff that would be great to be incentivised and changed through a needs-based funding.

DARLENE: Thank you, Matt. I'm sorry to say I missed most of that. The joys of technology. I had a phone call come in, and do you think I could hang up from it? It just overrode my whole system. I don't know if people were watching my face but you would have seen a very panic-stricken face, so I do apologise. And it's probably the first time I haven't had the captions on. Normally I would have had the captions on and could have followed along. I do apologise. I will go back and listen, don't worry. Nadine, you have a question, or continue the conversation?

NADINE: You should not have disclosed that, Darlene. You should have kept quiet on that. Nobody would have noticed because we were so rapt with what Matt was saying. I want to add to that. I think Matt made some super, super important points. What I would say, as somebody who describes herself as a professional hybrid, who has worked for a long time as a practitioner and a senior manager, but is also research trained and research active, I have amazing compassion for our academic colleagues and amazing respect for our professional colleagues. And what I want to say is this stuff is not simple. If it was simple, we would have done it. This is hugely complex. It is not something that the ordinary academic is comfortable taking on.

I think that the real difference the government can make in this space is to pay for experts. That's what they are. They're experts and they are translators, and they understand the needs of the students, the needs of the academics, the needs of the practitioners. And really tie this together. It is not simple and it takes a level of expertise to do this.

Currently, there's not enough of us in that space, and it needs to be funded and incentivised. Otherwise we are not going to get there. You know, there are also, again, expensive experts in their own right, but that is the translation effort that we need, and it's literally a working alongside, a co designing, a translation. That is the kind of work that we need to do to really shift practice in that space.

DARLENE: Thanks. Yvonne.

YVONNE: Look, I just want to add to that as well that what we're also talking about is really major cultural shifts, not just within the university but the community, and really addressing issues to do with discrimination and core values and addressing that. And so we're talking about major change in terms of where people see importance and their personal value systems.

So there's a very great need for leaders and champions within all fields of government, universities and employment to really do this kind of work around acknowledging the need for change, not just the rhetoric or the virtual signalling, and that seems to happen across our community. It really is about vote with your feet and also action rather than just self-promotion or talk. You know, I think that there are much deeper engrained prejudices that don't necessarily get called out. So I think there's really major changes generally across our whole community around valuing all people and addressing some of these issues, and it's not a simple solution.

DARLENE: No. And I think Nadine summed it up. Otherwise we would have solved some of the challenges already. So, Ebe, you have your hand up, but I also had a question for you in regards to you talked about the what works. And one of the challenges, I suppose, with the HEPPP program, the previous HEPPP program that so many things happened around many of the universities, but often people didn't know about it. You know, we didn't actually have a good understanding of what works. And you were talking about going for that individual adjustment to that universal. Have you got any thoughts around how? But I also don't want to stop you answering the question, or talking about what you were going to talk about.

EBE: No worries. I'll quickly add on to the end of that conversation. I think sometimes when we have this conversation, we create this artificial delineation between students with disability on one side and the staff. And the reality is that, you know, there are lots of students who are also staff and vice versa. There are lots of staff with disability who have incredible lived experience who can contribute to the practice in universities. There are lots of teaching staff with disability or teaching staff who have experience doing fantastic inclusive practice and really good pedagogical design, but they're just not necessarily resourced to do that work or to share that work.

And the people who do stick their neck out to share that work and create networks with other teaching staff or across institutions, that work isn't necessarily recognised in performance appraisal. The way that we do performance appraisal and promotions for both professional and academic staff in universities actively disincentivises staff from doing this kind of work. And so if we're going to look at systemic approaches and changes to culture as a mechanism that sits alongside needs based funding, I think a recognition that the delineation between these groups is not so clear, perhaps. And also that we need to recognise the value of this work that has traditionally been done by people with lived experience, or people who have a predisposition to be compassionate and live to what these issues are and want to dedicate space towards it.

And I won't go down the rabbit hole of, you know, I suppose, performance appraisal in universities and the way that it devalues certain types of work that can tend to be, I guess, completed alongside of gender or other marginalised factors, but I think there's a little bit of that piece in there, too. Your question, Darlene, was can you rephrase that again for me because it's fallen out of my brain?

DARLENE: I suppose it was in your conversation with us at the beginning of this you talked around, you know, that often those individual adjustments are happening, and I suppose it's kind of then how do we take it from the individual to the universal, but how do you also assess what is working, I suppose. You know, we know lots of money has gone into the HEPPP program over many years and anyway, so. I hope that made sense.

EBE: No, no, no. I got you. So there's two things going on there. I think the first one comes back to what I was just saying around the fact that sharing practice is not something that's incentivised, and if we're going to benefit from the learnings and successes and failures of institutions who are doing great program work, or crap program work, and not repeat the same mistakes over and over again, we need mechanisms by which to connect people up and to incentivise people to do that.

ADCET is a really great place where that happens. Today is a very long-time listener first phone caller experience for me. I have been listening to ADCET webinars for years, as a student and as a practitioner. This is a place where I see really fantastic exchange of ideas happening. And a world where there isn't an ADCET that's able to do that is a pretty depressing sounding world to me, and I think that resourcing this work where we do this exchange of ideas and sharing of practice is really important.

The other side to that conversation is the evaluations piece. And in the needs-based funding consultation paper there is a conversation about, you know, how do we evaluate what works and make sure that we somehow tie this to the way that we give funding, but also we don't want to put too many regulatory burdens on universities. Like, there just seems to be this tension between being able to have well evaluated and solid programs and not making universities work too hard which I won't comment on that, necessarily, but I think we can all make a judgment about which one we would prefer, I suppose.

But I guess evaluation hasn't necessarily been done in a systematic way in this space at a sort of institutional level or at scale. There's lots of great individual program evaluation that happens at some institutions, and again there are lots of people on the panel who have been responsible for that. We've also seen, you know, reasonable kind of evaluation in the VET sector not necessarily in disability, but across some of the other cohorts that we're talking about in the context of needs-based funding.

So I suppose centres like Access play a bit of a role in terms of looking at what is good practice around evaluation, not necessarily best practice because it's always changing and we learn things every day, and partnering with places like ADCET that have that really fantastic disability specific lens to be able to apply over that.

The one caution I place on this evaluation piece is that evaluation is often done by staff, not students. It's not co led by students and the data isn't analysed by students. And so the recommendations that come out of these evaluations are often along the lines of the sorts of things that staff see as a priority. In my research, I'm finding that the way that students conceptualise their experience at university and they talk about the sorts of things that happen, all their experiences that are really formative, their classroom experiences, and their academic experience are right at the bottom of that list. Really, the value that we get from coming to university is broadening our world view, meeting new people, understanding new perspectives, developing our aspirations for the future, understanding who we are.

For disabled students, it's connecting with others, and what does a disabled identity mean? What is disability pride? It's not necessarily whether or not I got this piece of AT this week or that week. So I think the student voice and the student priorities need to be embedded in that evaluation too, because I think some of those incredible benefits that are really formative to students, they get missed in some of this evaluation. And so projects that are student led and self-determined that perhaps don't necessarily perform as well in that academic success metric, but they're doing lots of fantastic other things. And we really don't want those to get lost, just based on the fact that the priorities between some staff and some students aren't necessarily a good match. So that's my thoughts on evaluation, that we need lots of talk about this. Like, we all really need to be talking about this more collectively, staff and students together.

DARLENE: Thank you. Yeah, ditto to everything you said. I think it's really important we keep having these conversations because I feel like we're barrelling along a road very quickly and we're not stopping to think about the implications and ramifications of it all. Matt?

MATT: A couple of final things, and hopefully there's no extra calls coming through while I deliver it in the background so that people don't get to hear what I've got to say.

I just wanted to echo Ebe's points around ADCET. And ADCET has been doing incredible things for a long period of time on the smell of an oily rag. It is really, really admirable. We've got people here today from all sorts of universities all around the country, and I think we should all just be putting a subtle ploy in to say, "ADCET needs security of funding and more funding to be able to continue to do the work that it's doing." I just wanted to get that out.

On the evaluation front, just building on that a little bit, it's perplexing to me why disability has not been subject to the more thorough investigation that it deserves. I've put a few things out there, and I'm just a humble policy nerd, in some respects, and I've done my little bit. But why is this not something that's been a focus of more research, more evaluation, more funding, et cetera? I don't want to throw Andrew under the bus here, because it wasn't his terms of reference, and he was just going along with what the government said, but back in the day the review of the demand driven funding system looked at other equity groups but didn't include disability.

There were plenty of examples in all sorts of ways, but disability, "It's all a bit too hard. We won't look at it, we won't do it." I think if needs-based funding is set up in the right way, if it's got an evaluation component within that model, it might allow us to do the kind of work that needs to be done.

And with that in mind, I'll maybe give a bit of a shameless plug. There's a book on student engagement coming out soon. People might have seen that in their LinkedIn feeds, et cetera. I've got a chapter in that with Kelly George who is part of the audience today, and we've looked at student experience survey data around students with/without disability, and probably providing a level of nuance that hasn't been done previously.

We've been collecting student experience survey data for a long, long time. Why am I the first person to go down that level of detail and do that? There's something here around structural issues in higher education that are not either funding, nor incentivising, nor engaging people who have got an interest in this to do the kind of thorough investigation that needs to be done. We need much more of it. Ebe, with your research, with your Masters, God speed. Next step PhD, and next step Professorship, sort of bringing your incredible insights already to really advance knowledge and scholarship in this space. Bring it on.

DARLENE: Andrew, did you want to make a comment at all?

ANDREW: I'll let that one go.

DARLENE: All right. Thank you. There are quite a few questions coming in, and thank you for the panellists who have stepped in and answered some of those as we've gone along. A couple of comments as well. Somebody's written: is there any consideration of funding to access full higher education offerings by wellbeing or student services? Some says that students there's been a refusal from unis to use access funding for things outside of reasonable adjustment for class and lecturers. It might be more of an individual basis. Do you think needs based funding will enable a more collective response to student need, not just kind of that individual need? Ebe.

EBE: Yeah. I think one of the things we talked about early on in the piece when the consultation paper came out that there's a specific line in there about needs based funding not being applicable to individual adjustments. And so I guess in this group and more broadly we've been having a conversation about so if needs-based funding is dropping, does that mean that DSP is also continuing? Does it mean that other features other pots of money that are currently facing funding adjustments are still going to exist?

Because it's very clear in the needs-based funding consultation paper that's not intended to be the main focus of what that money is. My read of the consultation paper is it's actually really very much focused on doing things like funding appropriate student support services and wellbeing services, particularly for students who fall into the so defined equity cohorts, but you hope that that has a trickle down effect in making sure that those are available to all students, regardless of whether or not they fit those very narrow definitions of what the government has decided makes you need things from universities.

So I suppose the answer is, you know, I hope so, but there's still a lot of questions around what the sort of medium to long term vision is here. What pots of money will continue to exist? Is needs based funding proposing to be the be all and end all of any sort of need that a student could possibly have? And if so, how is that sustainable?

We still don't know we don't have, I guess, a numerical value or a funding quantum that's been attached to any of these things, which makes it really difficult to think about what this looks like in a medium to long term view. So it's a bit of a wait and see, in my read of it all, but others might think differently.

DARLENE: Yep. Cathy, did you have your hand up or it's gone back down? Yep.

CATHY: Yeah, I did. But it comes back to that evaluation of what is a need and how much of that student voice is included in determining those needs. It does vary, of course, institution to institution. What is funded outside of lectures and classes? Quite rightly, everything should be funded. They are a member of that university community. Everything should be funded.

DARLENE: Yep. And Nadine.

NADINE: Yeah. Look, I just want to go back to scale and scope of this, you know, and what if any funding is attached to this. The ABS did a study on mental health in the community and found that 40% of young people, you know, 16 to 24 had a diagnosed mental health condition, more women than men. You know, these are the people who are either already at university or about to progress into university. So there's a little bit of COVID mental health tsunami coming our way. And if you overlay this with a fantastic project by Thomas and colleagues at the Institute for Social Science Research that was funded by Access, when it was still NCSEHE, as a small grant, they found that a pre-existing mental health condition had the same impact on attrition rate as being a First Nations person. With First Nations students, for those of you who are across this, have the highest attrition rates of any of the current equity groups in the sector.

So a student with a pre-existing mental health condition was about five times more likely to attrit than a student without. So there's a demonstrable risk. You know, like there's demonstrable need in these students and they're going to hit us in numbers that are unprecedented. Just putting that on the table for the people determining the size of the funding pot.

DARLENE: Thank you. And, look, you know, we don't know the size and there's so many things we don't know. So, I really commend everybody to having this conversation because there is so many unknowns at this stage, but we just wanted to start the conversation, and really encourage people to start thinking about the implications and the broader ideas that have been identified in the Accord.

The time has gone, as always with these things, so quickly and we've only got eight minutes to go. I'm just going to quickly go around the room for one last thought from each of the panel members, and even just if one of the what they would encourage, I suppose. One last thought but also what they'd encourage the people online to do or how to engage in the Accord and in the needs-based funding conversation. So I might start with because I started with you, Andrew, if you wanted to just have one of the last things to say.

ANDREW: I don't want to finish on a negative note, but I think the reality is that not everything will be funded. The government is in a tight budgetary situation. And painful as it is to talk about priorities, I think at the university level when they get this money, they're going to think very carefully about where they can get the most bang for their buck, and that will mean some needs probably won't get very much. But if we've got limited resources, we have to use them effectively.

DARLENE: I'm so glad I didn't end with you.

ANDREW: Exactly.

DARLENE: Thank you, Andrew. That's great. Yvonne.

YVONNE: I think one of the things I'd be saying is, really, one of the challenges is how do we evaluate what we do. You know, the resources and the spend that we already are currently doing, do we actually demonstrate effectively how we are spending it? I think really being able to work together as a collective group in the field, being able to develop some measures that are valuable I think would be really helpful. And definitely, I would put in a really good shout out for ADCET as well. As a body that helps corral such a diverse group of practitioners and researchers, et cetera, is a really great location for us to start having those conversations a bit broader about how do we measure.

DARLENE: Thanks Yvonne. Matt.

MATT: I tried to start reasonably positively at the start, Darlene, which is to say that we're moving away from a very, very small ration to pull the funding with partial reimbursement, to something that has the potential to be scalable, sort of growing more positive contribution to the sector. So it's right to be critical. It's right to be trying to optimise the settings here. But let's celebrate that there's a huge opportunity here and a huge potential if we can engage in the right way.

And whatever the government will do probably won't be perfect. As Andrew said, there's not a huge amount of money on the table, but it will be a starting point of things being better over the longer term, and I think we should all help the government do the right thing over the longer term in the way in which we engage in the process overall.

DARLENE: Thank you. Nadine.

NADINE: Any universal higher education system and this is where we are absolutely headed if we're not already there our student cohort is as diverse as the community at large. We know that in the community at large, 1 in 5 people have disability. This is a fact of life for universities and we cannot put our head into the sand. And the more everybody on the call can drive this message in their universities to, you know, flip anyone who is still in denial mode out of denial mode and into action, the better.

DARLENE: Thank you. Cathy.

CATHY: We have an opportunity to make change. To make that change we need a financial investment now so that change can be made. So people with disabilities can go on and get jobs and, et cetera, et cetera. So we need to put the money in now. What is spent on the DSP is so minimal. It needs to quadruple, and more, and if we can achieve change, then we can have people with disabilities in employment and giving back so much to our communities as a whole.

DARLENE: Thank you, Cathy. And Ebe.

EBE: The systemic and cultural change we've been talking about today can feel really intangible when we talk about it like that, but it is made up of lots of individuals taking individual action over time. And so if everyone who tuned into the call today can go away and think about what's the number 1 most common challenge that you're facing in your interface with students or service offering, whether you're a member of teaching staff, what's the number 1 request that you have, or the number 1 thing that you find yourself doing on an individual basis constantly?

If you're offering a student service, what's the number 1 thing that students come to you complaining about and looking for support with? And if you can start thinking about how you lift the solution up to the next level, rather than just solving it 100 times for every student that comes to you, and thinking about making the structural change that eliminates that barrier for good, then that is how we start, I guess, tipping the dominos over towards creating a higher education system that is genuinely designed for the full diversity of the community that it's supposed to be serving.

DARLENE: Thank you, Ebe. I knew you would be great to end on, and I don't want to say too much except I really thank the panel. It's fabulous to hear from you all I know we didn't get to all the questions. I do apologise for that, trying to wrangle the time as well, but I appreciate the conversation that's happened in the chat, and the Q&A and the responses people have given to each other.

This sector is absolutely brilliant in how we support and encourage the conversation.

Thank you to the panel members once again. An email will be sent to you with the recording. We encourage you to share that with your colleagues. All our information is free to access and yeah, just hope that we can help inform some of the challenges that exist and hopefully some of the things that will improve higher education going forward.

We also have a short survey. We'd like to get your feedback, as always, trying to collect the data we need to prove our worth, but I think I probably need to send money to each of the panel members for the wonderful things they've said about ADCET. That certainly wasn't a set up but the cheque is in the mail. So I think the links are also going there. If you're not signed up to our newsletter, please do. Probably each fortnight we send out information around lots of things, not just what we do, but on what's impacting the sector going forward.

And then we also have one coming up this week which is around universal design and implementation and inclusive design, which is a presentation from Frederic Fovet, a Canadian academic and professional, and showcasing research that he's undertaken in regards to implementation of universal design for learning and the connection between students and faculties. So it will be really interesting. It's actually a workshop so people can get on and talk and do some group work as well in that conversation.

All right. Well, we're right on time. So thank you, everybody. It's great to have the conversation and thank you, everybody, for joining us today, and especially the panel members, and our Auslan interpreters and our Captioner. Thank you, all.