DARLENE MCLENNAN: Welcome, everybody. Thank you for joining us today. For those who don't know me, my name is Darlene McLennan, and I'm the Manager of the Australia Disability Clearinghouse on Education and Training, or ADCET for short. My pronouns are she and her, and I'm a white woman in my mid 50s with grey-brown hair, glasses, and I'm wearing a green top today.

This webinar is being live captioned. You can activate your captions by clicking on the cc button in the toolbar. It is located at the top or the bottom of your screen. We also have captions available via a browser, and we'll pop into the chat now that link if people want to access the captions externally.

ADCET is hosted on Lutruwita, Tasmanian Aboriginal land, and in the spirit of reconciliation I, and ADCET, want to respectfully acknowledge the Lutruwita nations and also recognise the Aboriginal history and culture of the land. And I want to pay my respect to elders past and present and emerging, and to the many Aboriginal people that did not make Elder status.

I also want to acknowledge all the countries and lands of participants in this meeting, and also acknowledge their Elders and ancestors, and their legacy to us, and any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people joining the webinar today. If it's the first time you've joined us, we would encourage you encourage you to put in for everybody to put in the chat the lands on which you are to recognise that. So it's one of the nice things we do. It's also a great way to let everybody know who else is in the room.

Okay. Today's webinar, Building Neuro Inclusive Education Diversified, the Power of Collaboration and Co production. With us today, we're joined by the Diversified team, Professor Terry Cumming, Karen Kriss, Chantel Le Cross and Aaron Saint James. They will explore the barriers of neurodiverse students’ space, share development process behind the toolkit that they are creating for educators, and discuss ongoing research to improve neurodiversity inclusion.

Just continuing on with the housekeeping. As we said, the webinar is being live captioned by the wonderful Jason from Bradley Reporting. It will be recorded and the recording will be added to ADCET in the coming days. If you're having any technical difficulties, you can email us at admin@adcet.edu.au. The presentation will run for around 45 to 50 minutes, and then we'll have 10 minutes for questions. We encourage people to chat and share links, and so forth, in the chat box throughout the presentation. But if you'd like for me to ask questions at the end, please choose the Q&A box. That's where we'll add the questions to. But also if you are chatting in the box, make sure you choose everyone, instead of "all panellists and attendees" so everybody can see your chat. But just a reminder, please put your questions in the Q&A box, not the chat box.

Okay. Karen's our first speaker, so I'm going to hand over to her. Thank you very much, and we're really looking forward to this presentation.

KAREN KRISS: Thank you, Darlene. I'd like to welcome you all here today for the webinar Building Your Inclusive Education with Diversified: The Power of Collaboration and Co production. Next slide.

So it's great to see everybody adding where they're coming from in the webinar chat. It's great to see. As we all gather on unceded land, I want to start by acknowledging that today we are coming to you from the lands of the Gadigal and the Gundungurra People. UNSW operates across the lands of the Bedegal, Gadigal and Ngunnawal Peoples. I pay my respects to Elders past and present. I also extend this respect to all First Nations and Torres Strait Islander People and recognise they're enduring connection to this land, waters and community and affirm that sovereignty was never ceded. Next slide.

So my name is Karen Kriss. I'm one of the founding members of Diversified. I'm an artist, an animator, and Senior Lecturer at University of New South Wales School of Art and Design. I'm also a disability adviser and disability champion for the Faculty of Arts Design and Architecture. My pronouns are she/her. I am a white woman, almost 50. I have short dark hair with round yellow glasses, black top, plain white background with Diversified logo top right and the University logo to the left.

So today, as we dive into today's session, we want to give you an understanding of what we hope to achieve. Our focus is on building a neuro inclusive education system and collaboration is at the heart of this. So our four key aims for today's webinar are we aim to, firstly, introduce you to Diversified. We are really excited to share our journey with you and to show you how this collective of neurodivergent students, staff and academics is transforming education at UNSW. Our mission is centred on collaboration, and we want you to see how we're making real change happen.

Secondly, we aim to deepen your understanding of neurodivergence, perhaps broaden your perspective on how the neurodiversity paradigm might challenge traditional thinking.

We also explore the power of collaboration, its role in the creation of our toolkit for educators. Neurodivergent students face unique barriers and today we'd like to shed light on what we've learnt of these challenges and how academics and students can work together to break down those barriers. We'd also like to talk about how you can be involved in our ongoing research and advocacy work.

You will also hear from some of our team, our students, navigating higher education. Next slide, please. So our speakers today include Terry Cumming. Terry is a Professor of Special Education in the School of Education, the Deputy Head of School of Education at the Faculty of Arts Design and Architecture; the Academic Lead Education for the UNSW Disability Innovation Institute; and the Scientia Education Fellow at UNSW Sydney. Her research aims to improve the experiences of people with disability by working with educators to reduce the research to practice gap through the implementation of evidence-based practices. Terry is also one of our founding members of Diversified and is the lead researcher on our latest research project on the toolkit for educators.

Then we have Aaron Saint James. Aaron is a third-year molecular biology student at UNSW. As a queer neurodivergent student and founding member of Diversified, Aaron advocates for neurodiversity and works on initiatives to improve accessibility for students. Aaron is one of our founding student members of Diversified and responsible for driving a lot of our advocacy work.

We also have Chantel Le Cross. Chantel brings their experience across project management, advocacy and health promotion. A non-binary neurodivergent person, Chantel works at UNSW and collaborates on various projects promoting inclusivity with a focus on how power dynamics influence identity and policy. Chantel is also our Project Manager at Diversified and often keeps us all on time and task.

So if you haven't heard of Diversified before, let me introduce us just briefly, and to some of the rest of the team. So in the image on the slide, we have several of the Diversified team members pictured, including some that we'll be speaking today. They're all standing quite close together, smiling with black Diversified t shirts. This includes from left Aaron Saint James, Brian Bijang, Terry Cumming, Karen Watson and myself. And missing here is also Associate Professor Ian McArthur, who is one of our founders as well.

So we are a collective of neurodivergent students, staff and academics at the University of New South Wales. We're working to ensure that neurodivergent people are central to the conversation and decisions that impact them.

So through research, education and advocacy, we aim to embed neuro inclusion within UNSW's educational framework and the policies. We're helping to create environments where neurodivergent individuals can thrive.

So what do we mean when we say "neurodivergent"? So at Diversified, we recognise that there are natural variations in how people think, learn, process information, and this includes individuals that may identify as autistic, ADHD, dyslexic, or who might need with Tourette's, OCD, epilepsy, anxiety, learning differences. We also acknowledge that access to diagnosis and support is not always equitable. There are systematic barriers that might complicate the process, things like gender, culture, language, visa status, economic challenges, and policy. Many neurodivergent people struggle to receive the health they deserve because of these barriers.

As advocates and allies, it's important to ensure these barriers are addressed and overcome. So that's why we advocate for equity so all neurodivergent individuals can access the resources that support them, whether they have a diagnosis, whether they choose to disclose it publicly or not, or are only at the beginning of their journey to understanding their neuro type. So we believe disclosure is a deeply personal choice. It's important to remember that neurodivergent people make meaningful contributions whether their identity is disclosed or not.

Neurodivergent individuals don't need to fit into a mould or reveal their diagnosis to validate their impact in their communities, workplaces or classrooms. Now I'll pass over to Aaron. Next slide, please.

AARON SAINT-JAMES: Thanks, Karen. We believe that embracing and celebrating the diversity of human minds is key to creating environments where every community member is understood, respected and supported to thrive. That's why we use a strength-based language when discussing neurodivergence and frame this under the neurodiversity paradigm. Now, the neurodiversity paradigm, cited by Walker 2012, challenges outdated norms and emphasises that societal barriers, not individual differences, are what are disabled neurodivergent individuals. By embracing the paradigm, educators can help dismantle stigma and frame equity as a community responsibility. The concept of neurodiversity reflects a pivotal shift from viewing neurological differences through a medical lens to understanding them within a social context. It sees neurodiversity as a biological fact, representing the infinite variations in neuro cognitive functioning.

We recognise the importance of understanding neurodiversity as a complex, multi-faceted concept that requires nuanced approaches in research and advocacy. Simply put, all humans are wired differently. Just like gender, culture and language, it's all part of the diversity that exists within our community, and these differences can influence how people think, learn, process sensory input and interact with others.

Neurodiversity is rooted in the social model of disability, which shifts the focus from individual deficits to societal barriers. Neurodivergent individuals bring valuable strengths, such as creativity, attention to detail and problem solving. However, traditional education systems often fail to recognise these strengths.

While neurodiversity celebrates the variation in human minds, neurodivergent students often face multiple barriers that are often outside the educator's control: lack of access to health care, cultural stigma, financial constraints and systemic inequities. Even someone's gender or visa status can make an impact. These barriers not only delay support, but can also exacerbate the challenges faced by neurodivergent students in educational settings. For example, rigid learning environments, inflexible deadlines, and traditional teaching methods don't adapt to the way we think and process information, forcing us to adapt to them.

Sensory and cognitive overload can make even the simplest tasks feel overwhelming. Social dynamics and communication barriers, whether due to unclear instructions, inaccessible resources or social stigma, can lead to frustration and disengagement.

Then there are the organisational demands that demand we navigate systems and processes that have often not been explained to us in a way that we understand or accept us to navigate cognitive processes in times of distress. This is alongside the psychosocial challenges, like social stigma, self-advocacy, managing mental health and navigating new social environments each term. But these barriers don't just impact our ability to study. It can often impact the way we are perceived. We're often seen as difficult, disruptive or disengaged students, unable to adapt to the adult learning environment, when in reality it's the environment that fails to adapt to us. And also we learn to adapt on our own.

Now, I want to tell you about Josie, a student who refused to believe her learning environments couldn't adapt. She's the reason we're all here today, and her story perfectly shows how impactful one person's actions can be. Josie faced an inaccessible assessment briefing that made it difficult to understand. Instead of just highlighting the problem, Josie took the initiative to adapt and problem solve by redesigning the brief to meet her needs. But Josie knew it wasn't just her who could benefit from the redesign, so she presented it to her educator, hoping to help other students.

The educator recognised the value of her solution and they began to collaborate on ensuring all aspects of the course were accessible. Josie's challenges were integrated into the course design, and today that revised briefing is still being used, and not just in that course.

Through this process, Josie gained awareness of how these challenges could benefit others and began advocating for greater improvements. And this is how Diversified was born. Her story shows us the power of self-advocacy and student/teacher collaboration, and highlights just one aspect of the daily challenges neurodivergent students navigate on a daily basis. Forced to constantly innovate and find new ways to engage with their learning environment, which is very tiring, by the way. But when we can identify barriers, collaborate and act, we can create real lasting change.

Now, I stand before you today as a mature aged, queer, neurodivergent student with many chronic health conditions. And I'm truly grateful for the opportunities that Diversified project has given me. Like Josie's story, my journey began as one of growth and self-advocacy.

I think back to my nine-year-old self, growing up in a lower SES background, and I could never have imagined that one day I'd be making such an impact at a place like UNSW. This project has transformed me both personally and professionally. What started as a learning opportunity became something far more empowering. I found myself not just as a student, but working alongside academics as a peer. I've had the chance to co-author a published paper all without your holding a degree. That experience is proof that when you stand up for what you believe in and advocate for yourself, the possibilities are endless.

Through my work on Diversified, I've learned, firsthand, the importance of co design and co production, where students and educators come together as equals to create meaningful change. It's not just about individual advocacy, it's about how collaboration can break down barriers and improve the system for everyone. I encourage all of you, students and staff alike, to stay curious and brave. When you see something that needs to change, don't hesitate to question it. Be bold enough to push for improvements and, just as importantly, support others in their efforts to do the same.

Sometimes all it takes is just giving someone the small amount of support or encouragement they need to succeed. Thank you. I'll pass you on to Terry now.

TERRY CUMMING: Thank you, Aaron. Those stories are always so inspiring to me, even though I've heard them a couple of times. That's a really nice lead in to my slide, which is the power of collaboration and how we can use student voices to impact education in a positive way. It's an emerging field. I have been a special educator since my Bachelors degree, but it's just been the past few years that my research has moved away from school aged children to university adults, students that are neurodivergent. And it really is an emerging area of research. If you look at the citations that are on that slide, you'll see they're all pretty recent, because we're finally realising at this level that collaborating and co-producing and co designing with students is the way to go. It gives students a voice. It allows us, as educators, to help those students overcome those challenges, but also it makes us better educators. I have, besides all of the other benefits of Diversified, for my own personal benefit, having that feeling of belonging and fitting in with a group, but also I've learned so much from working with all the different people, students, and staff that are in the group.

I identify as neurodivergent myself, but the other thing to realise is they always say it about many different disabilities, but if you've met one neurodivergent person, you've literally met one neurodivergent person. So one of the other things we've learned to do while we're collaborating, it's not just about working together, but we've had to find ways that we can work together to make things work and make things better. So, really, what we're all about is making sure that students feel recognised, that their voices are heard, cherished, comprehended, and making sure that our neurodivergent students don't fall through the cracks at university.

So when we got together as a group, we were lucky enough to secure a small grant so that we can go out and hear more student voices; find out from students what they need to access their education, to feel connected to the university, which is a very big part of being successful in your studies, that sense of connection, that sense of belonging. From primary school straight through university, there's a lot of research that shows how important those things are.

So we held some workshops where students got together in groups, and in large groups, and we asked them what they wanted. Once we got all of their feedback and we analysed it, we managed to categorise their needs into four areas: spaces such as environments, infrastructure, and technology. And as Aaron said, some of these things, as instructors, we have very little sway over. We can't change some of those things. Administration and processes, student identity and culture, and staff and academic culture.

So we broke these down into other levels. Like I said, we, as instructors, cannot do a lot about the systemic things, except we can advocate to have those changed. And then the next level down was faculty in school, and then course and instructor, which is something that we can look at and make changes immediately. The other ones are things that we will continue to advocate and work on.

So while we're putting these together, always keeping in mind, especially when we're talking about course design, that we're looking at universal design for learning. And when you hear people speak about universal design for learning and I'm sure many of the people that are here today know what this is, so I'm going to go through this pretty quickly, but I'm happy to answer questions later universal design started in architecture, and it was about building structures and areas for people that were accessible from the get go. So you didn't have to put a ramp up later or install a lift in a building.

So it's the same for teaching and learning. Some of the accommodations and modifications that school children had on their individualised education plans were things that were actually beneficial to everybody, and things that were easy to build in right away. So some academics in the United States got together and did a whole lot of research, and they've come up with universal design for learning. Basically, there's three pillars. Giving students multiple ways they can engage with learning. Most of us do this really well. It's about giving students time to do discussions, online classes versus face-to-face classes, versus watching a video, or reading a chapter. Representation or the "what" of learning is how we present that material. I think we also, for the most part, do this very well. Generally, if I have a two-hour lecture, I am not going to stand there and talk for two hours. I can't even stand to listen to myself do that for that long, much less subject to other people to it. So I'll show a video, I use multimedia, I use little quizzes, whiteboards on my screen, that sort of thing, student discussions.

But the one that I think we have more trouble in higher education, out of the three, is multiple means of action and expression. Giving students choices on how to show what they've learned. Mostly because this is a systemic issue. It takes an act of God and 15 committees to change an assessment, and making people understand that you can measure learning outcomes with an essay, or maybe with a video that a student makes, and that you're still measuring the same learning outcomes. So this is an area where we're still advocating and working towards.

Overall, all that means is we're making our courses accessible to start with for as many students as possible. This does not eliminate the need for individual educational learning plans or support plans. However, for some students, it might eliminate that need and it might eliminate the need for them to have to disclose.

And while we're speaking of disclosure, have a look at this graph. And I don't normally read, but there's a lot of numbers involved and I have trouble memorising them. So we know for a fact that there's a growing population of students who are neurodivergent attending university. And this is a wonderful thing. It's amazing that people are all encouraged to go ahead and come to uni and that we can support them.

So in the past 15 years, we have gone from 4% of our population identifying as having a disability in Australia in higher education, to 9.4% in 2021. And this is according to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. But these students are also more likely to consider dropping out, and more often rate their educational experience less positively than their non-disabled peers. Here at UNSW, at the beginning of term 1 of this year, we had 1,900 students enrolled in the educational learning program. Of these, 53% are neurodivergent. The breakdown of disability show that the majority of students face mental health challenges, with 1,152 students falling into this category out of that 1900.

ADHD and ADD is the second largest group with 627 students. And we also see some significant representation from students with medical and chronic health conditions, 364 students, and those on the autism spectrum, which are 147 students. Now, hopefully our neurodivergent student body will continue to grow, so we need to continue to focus on removing some of the barriers.

Here's some more statistics, and here's some of these barriers. 5.4% lower of a success rate than neurotypical peers. In 2022, 10.6% of the domestic undergraduate students were registered as living with a disability; 2.3% lower satisfaction students with disabilities are less satisfied with their overall experience compared to their non-disabled peers; and unfortunately, and this is the big one, 8. 9% lower employment after they graduate than non-disabled peers.

So these are still some of the things that we really need to work on. And I believe that that lower success rate and lower satisfaction are where we need to start. And hopefully, if we can work on that, the employment numbers will improve also. And with that, I will hand over to you, Chantel.

CHANTEL LE CROSS: Thanks so much, Terry. I always love watching you present. It's amazing you do it without notes. I'm going to start off by sharing a little bit about myself and my story. The statistics that Terry has just outlined, they resonate with me so deeply because they're my lived experience. Navigating higher education as a neurodivergent person can really often feel like an uphill battle. When I look back on my entire life, as well, it really feels like I've often just kind of been straddling two worlds. On the one hand, as a kid, I had this large vocabulary and intense curiosity, and I was obsessed with things like ancient Egypt, and I would always like pull apart things to figure out how they work so I could put them back together, and I did that with the VCR one time and my parents were not pleased. I was even kicked out of preschool when I was four because I refused to nap and I could read before everyone else, so I would always take over reading time.

Even though I had these really early developmental kind of just achievements, when I hit school it was a completely different story. I couldn't read clocks. I really struggled to learn how to read the clocks. I never really got my pen licence, and I also really struggled with following verbal instructions.

By the time I hit 4th grade, I was actually placed in a special education program because I just didn't fit the mould of what a successful student looked like. And year after year, every time I changed grades and got a new teacher, they would be telling my parents, "You need to get this kid tested", and every year the results came back "ambiguous". I had a really high IQ, but it just wasn't showing up in my academic work; it wasn't translating to school.

It wasn't until an assistant teacher in the special education program kind of noticed me huddled up in the back of the classroom reading Nietzsche at 11 that my dyslexia was picked up, and I was finally moved into an extension English program and taken out of the special education program and kind of supported in understanding how I learn and given that opportunity to learn more.

But I still struggled and, as I grew into my teens, my mental health really declined and I struggled to make friends. I developed agoraphobia and went through really intense phase of school refusal, and the world just got really overwhelming. And five weeks before my year 11 exams, I had a complete breakdown and I never went back to school.

By the time I was 17, I had been tested over five times but as someone assigned female at birth, the research just didn't reflect my experiences and, like many millennials, I was misdiagnosed with a string of mood disorders. It wasn't until I was 31 and three years into my Bachelor degree that I finally received my autism and ADHD diagnosis. Just imagine years of being misunderstood, fighting through education and work because I just didn't fit the mould of a typical neurodivergent person.

During this time, I also developed a lot of chronic illnesses. And this is a really common co-occurrence with neurodivergent people, as Aaron's mentioned as well, and they're just now starting to show genetic and auto immune connections between neurodivergence and other chronic illnesses. And managing both neurodivergence and chronic illness means I had to constantly pivot my career and I was struggling to be seen as a leader or progressing because of other people's perceptions about my support needs.

But despite those challenges, I have actually been quite successful in my career. I've had some really good experiences and been able to work on some really great projects and kind of push forward within that career.

But I wasn't really happy with my career and where it was heading and what the opportunities laid ahead for me. And that's ultimately what led me to engage in higher education at 28. And studying sociology blew my mind. It gave me the language I had always needed to describe the experiences that I had been going through, but university came with its own set of challenges. The constant shift in timetables and new educators every semester; the sensory overload of large lecture halls, just so overwhelming and made it so hard to learn. I was burning out.

And then COVID hit and suddenly the world became really accessible to me. Online learning was a game changer. I had less transitions. I didn't have to navigate the buzz of the outside world and I could learn comfortably from my home, all while maintaining a job. And even with the right diagnosis, I still had moments where I didn't make it. And I was a mature aged student paying my own way through university while working full time. And I was often in jobs that were lower paying because I needed the flexibility to work around my education. And it really impacted my career growth. I watched my friends buy houses while I was struggling with the university calendar. And imposter syndrome. I really struggled to balance work and chronic illness and study.

But what kept me going were educators, like Nama Carlin and Melanie White, who are two people to this day that I just look up to so much and thank them so much. They saw something in me that I just couldn't really see in myself, and they nurtured my curiosity and they encouraged me to learn and lean into my strengths. And for the first time, my need to question systems wasn't seen as defiance, but as something valuable. The support like this is really rare, and for many students the structural barriers within universities and their financial pressures are what prevent them from completing their degrees.

I was supposed to be finishing my honours this year, but burnout and chronic illness, I just needed a break and I needed to have some stable employment so I could have some security.

And this leads me into a deeper issue leadership. Even now, with all my experiences, I struggle to move into leadership positions. And as a neurodivergent person, I'm often infantilised. My work is scrutinized, and I'm left navigating indirect communication that leaves me uncertain about where I stand. There's this perception that because I need accommodations, like having my work proofread or needing to work from home, that I'm not capable.

But the truth is, workplaces need neurodivergent perspectives. And the ripple effect of inclusive practices start in the classroom. When we create inclusive classrooms, we aren't just making education accessible for students who need it; we're teaching all students that asking for support and accommodations is okay. We normalise different ways of learning and working, and those students can then carry that mindset into the workforce and embed those practices into their workplaces, creating a ripple effect of change.

In Australia, only 10% of people living with a disability hold leadership positions in their companies. And when we don't see ourselves in leadership, it becomes harder to imagine what's possible for us. It's not enough to just allow disabled neurodivergent or other marginalised people into education systems or workplaces; we actually have to ask ourselves why weren't they there in the first place? What barriers are still maintaining that prevent them from thriving?

Because when we truly let people contribute in ways that work for them, the impact that they can have is enormous. And educators, like Nama and Melanie, made all the difference for me, and showed me that my perspective was valuable, not in spite of my neurodivergence, but because of it. Universities may not be able to fix every systemic issue, but by embedding inclusive practices, they can normalise diverse approaches to learning and work. And when we do that, we can make it easier for disabled people and neurodivergent people to succeed, not just in the classroom, but in the workplace and beyond. Leadership doesn't have to look like the traditional model, and it's time to show students that their strengths and ways of thinking have a place in shaping the future.

And that's why Diversified is really excited to be launching the toolkit for educators, which provides them with the tools that they need to better understand the neurodivergent student experience and embed universal design learning practices into the classroom. When creating this toolkit, we embedded co design in our development process from the beginning, and we ensured that neurodivergent students and UNSW educators were able to provide their input based on their own experiences.

What started off as just a checklist has now evolved into a comprehensive toolkit that provides educators with a step-by-step guide on how they can implement our toolkit into their course design and delivery. Also, it includes videos designed to deepen their understanding of neurodivergence and gain vital context into the impact that these changes could have on neurodivergent students' educational experiences through interviews with our own UNSW neurodivergent community.

The toolkit includes five checklists. It also has an implementation roadmap, and six supporting videos. These resources provide educators with clear actionable steps for creating more inclusive classrooms, while also deepening their understanding of neurodiversity and the student experience, as I mentioned, through these video series.

But the implementation plan makes it easier for them to implement it into their practices. Our checklists cover five topics that all impact the inclusive practices of education, from inclusive curriculum and design, accessible course delivery, neurodivergent student engagement, assessment and feedback, and also class environment and sensory considerations.

Our supporting video series was, on a personal note, actually really emotional for me to be a part of. I was able to access this neurodivergent community that I kind of didn't know was there, and the students that we met, you know, I know Aaron has had some incredible experiences while we both get really emotional, just being able to see others out there and seeing them thrive and seeing what they're contributing to our community. And it's just so amazing that we're able to uplift those voices and make sure that they're providing the student experience and the student perspective to educators. Because it's often not able to be shared; there's not a lot of avenues for that to happen apart from, you know, end of year surveys.

We'll be releasing our toolkit for educators before the end of the year. But before we release it, we'll actually be recruiting for participants in our upcoming research project to look into UNSW educators' perceptions around neurodivergence and the design and implementation of inclusive teaching practices that we've outlined in our toolkit. We're really excited to release it to the public and to get more insight into how people are finding these resources. And I'm also really excited to be making sure that educators are getting the support that they deserve because they give us, as students, so much support, and I'm incredibly grateful for the teachers that really just put in that effort and make such a huge difference into our learning experience, our students.

That's pretty much it in terms of our webinar, but we do want to open up to questions from the room, and we would really encourage you to submit your questions in the chat. I know we also have some pre submitted ones, but we do just want to leave you with understanding that by advocating for yourself and others, you actually have the power to really create meaningful, lasting change. So if you're finding that you're kind of always waiting, you're trying to battle the institution, don't wait, because we didn't, and it's been really, really beneficial for us. And if you'd like to stay up to date with Diversified and what we're doing, and also make sure you get notified when we do release our toolkit, you can scan the QR code to sign up to our newsletter, and I also know it's going to be put in the chat as well.

So thank you so much for your time today. And Darlene, I'll hand it to you.

DARLENE: Thank you, Chantel, and thank you, Karen, Aaron and Terry. That was actually fabulous. I think you can experience the love on the screen. We're getting lots of claps and lots of love hearts popping up, which is fabulous. And there's also been some great chat throughout, which I've noticed, Aaron, you've been engaging in, so that's wonderful.

One of the questions we answered, which I've put into the answers, and hopefully people see it, was the data sets. So it's very exciting. We actually received the data around students with disability not long ago, from 2023, which is unusual. We normally get it years later. So the department have been really good in sharing the student data, which is great, and there's also been some work with the Australian Student Equity Centre based at Curtin, and then for the paper, which I've put in as well.

So a couple of questions that have come through. Someone said, "I'm a huge advocate for flexibility in assessment. But obviously, it tends to be very hard to get across to the powers that be, you know, the fairness argument often gets in their way and any suggestions from your experience. So I haven't asked this question very well. Sorry, I was trying to kind of cut it down and made it longer. "So as a huge advocate of flexibility in assessments, due dates, forms, modes, obviously this tends to be very hard to get across to the powers that be, fairness arguments often get in the way. Any suggestions from your experience on how to tackle this? Anybody want to? Often, we certainly use the equal playing field often. Terry?

TERRY: Yeah. Well, I think it starts at the beginning of a course, because I just start my course that way, and I've always had to do it. I was a high school teacher for 20 years, so it's just something that I've always included in the culture of teaching and learning in my classroom, whether it was a school classroom or higher ed classroom. There is no arguments about that. It's not about fair, it's about everybody getting what they need, you know. The same thing as you're saying, it's that it's that thing that we're always saying, the picture of people looking through the fence, or standing on the boxes, or a fish trying to climb a tree. We've seen all the little memes and the ways to illustrate this. And I think that part of it's getting easier. I think that, as a society, we're realising this more, which is great. Yeah, I make that very clear from the beginning.

But also, I tend to offer everybody the same kind of it's part of that universal design for learning. I tend to offer everyone the same modifications or accommodations. And we now have a short extension policy here at UNSW, which is really nice because students just can elect to get a short extension. Whereas people with EDLP might need longer, and that's fine, but everybody has that chance.

DARLENE: Excellent. One of the questions has been around the release. And I suppose, yeah, it's kind of we got so excited when we saw this coming that we couldn't wait for the release. We wanted you guys to present you all to present as quickly as possible. So the dates, we certainly will continue to promote this resource, and we'll certainly be having links all over our website and providing information, because I think it's going to be such an effort to this sector.

TERRY: We appreciate that, but because we're researching it and there's a self-efficacy before and after, we don't want to release it until we've collected the self-efficacy data. And then once we do, we can release it outside of UNSW at the same time as we release it to UNSW. That's fine. We want it to get out there and be useful for people. That's the whole reason.

CHANTEL: We'll be starting our recruitment in November as well, and then we'll release it once recruitment so mid-December. Christmas present for everyone.

DARLENE: That's great.

TERRY: Just in time to design your course for next year over the holidays, like we all do.

DARLENE: That's fabulous. Someone has written here, "Thanks for all the work in the area. I'm interested in neurodiverse students flourishing, and how this is going to show my disability of not being able to pronounce things very well. The hetero" sorry, I can't pronounce that, if anybody else wants to read it "approaches can enhance experience and success." Anyone on the presenting panel have thoughts to share? Have you seen that question?

CHANTEL: Is that question written somewhere?

DARLENE: It's in the Q&A, not the chat. Can you pick that up, or not? Yeah. While you are looking at that, there's just another question: "Do you have guidance to those of us with colleagues who might not engage with these materials as deeply as we might hope? Like, is there a starting point in these resources, e.g., one video or one bit that especially impactful and invites folks in?"

CHANTEL: I'm happy to answer that, as Terry can also build on it. I think the implementation roadmap is kind of why we created that. It gives really clear outlines in terms of how educators can use this from a, you know, design standpoint, the design of their course, to implementing the changes into their course, to delivering it and then also reviewing it. And we also really encourage student feedback into that process, as well, of reviewing it.

The way in which the videos are designed is we want you to kind of have the checklist with the videos. So, there's the very first one in the video series is basically like your introduction to neurodiversity, and it kind of goes deeper into what we've talked about today from, you know, going deeper into the neurodiversity paradigm, the kind of historical context, some of the policy aspects of how disability policy has changed over time. It's also embedded student experiences, misinformation, all that sort of staff. So I'd recommend that's where you start, that one, because it gives you this really important context of just understanding what neurodiversity is so that you can go in with that framework of like, "Okay, this is the demographic that we're talking about and this is the historical context." Sorry, my sociology is coming out right now. But, yeah, start from there. And then the videos go in order from 1 to 5, and they each relate to each checklist. And we just encourage you to work through the checklist with the video, and the videos are there for you to refer back to as well. A forever resource for you to just kind of, you know, if something comes up within your course and you're like, "There might be something in that video that will give me some context to that."

DARLENE: That's brilliant. Thank you, Chantel. Sorry, Terry, did you want to add to that?

TERRY: If you want me to go back to Paula's question, I'm not going to lie, I had to Google that word. I have never heard of it.

DARLENE: John has put it in the chat, how to say it, so thank you, John. I need you to follow me around.

TERRY: I'm looking at it and I'm thinking "that's a lot of, like, project based learning, and letting students go ahead and investigate the parts of your course that they're the most interested in, and finding the problems and then the answers to the problems", and I think that's all great and I think that's where the UDL comes in, because that would be something you could offer as a student choice.

Because I have some students that would thrive so well with that, and then I have other students whose anxiety is so high that if I don't give a template with a very heavily scaffolded way I want the assessment to be I mean, they want to know how many words in each section, even, so that would not work for students like that.

And it just points to the great variance in our neurodiversity as human beings, in general. I mean, if somebody said, "write an essay or do an artwork to illustrate this", I am writing that essay all day long. While other students would, you know, be getting their creative on and do maybe a better job than I did with my essay. But it is a matter of, you know, allowing people to learn the way they're the most comfortable.

DARLENE: Definitely. So Aaron, did you want to feed into that as well, and Chantel?

AARON: I just wanted to follow on from what Chantel was saying before. Originally we found out from the Pro Vice Chancellors that "accessibility" is such a loaded word, a very ambiguous word. And it was too scary for professional staff, as well as academics, to approach. So we actually start by dismantling that loaded word of what accessibility is at a course and a systemic level, just to kind of reduce the first barrier of entry to our checklist. I just wanted to emphasise that.

And also to a question in the chat about the dropout rates, and difficulty of staying through degree to completion. I think that that's what we're trying to aim for with this inclusive education toolkit. Obviously, we can't tackle that right now, but hopefully in the future the impact of this will help students complete their degrees, because I do understand that there are a lot of dropout rates. And it's very difficult to manage that right now, but that's, I think, something that we're trying to make impact in the future with what we're doing. Yeah.

DARLENE: And sometimes that gets forgotten about, is, you know, often our job to make sure we have an inclusive environment, and so forth, is to ensure students succeed. And for universities being counted, that means money if a student stays, so they really need to take it quite seriously. Chantel?

CHANTEL: Yes. I wanted to follow on from what Terry's saying. I think that question is also kind of going into the aspects of, like, vagueness in learning. And sometimes how, especially when you're trying to prepare students for industry, you know, you're not always going to get specific work. And similar to what Terry was talking about is that you get students that need to have everything laid out word for word, and things like that.

A lot of the conversations that I've had with students about that need for that specificity, even people who aren't neurodivergent, a lot of it is fear. A lot of them are going into an adult learning environment for the very first time, and they're dealing with a lot of responsibility, and they're dealing with a lot of social aspects and demands that they haven't had to navigate before. And there's a lot of fear of doing it wrong, especially when you have international students whose literal grades are reliant on them staying in the country and actually completing their degree within a specific amount of time, and that also leads to a lot of neurodivergent students who are international, getting into that burnout because they have to, like, have a heavy load. They can't study part time, they can't have those kind of accommodations.

And I actually really like this discussion, now that I've processed it a little bit more, because my friend did her master's on vagueness within teaching, and she's a film studies educator, and talked about the kind of entry into industry and navigating that with neurodivergent students. From an autistic perspective, I love the opportunity to try something different and to do something out of the box. However, in order for me to feel confident in my ability to do that, I need to have really clear parameters and I need them to be explained to me in quite a very specific way that is quite accessible to me. Not so much in a way that is limiting, but just more so setting expectations, because also I think a lot of autistic people, and probably a lot of ADHD people, go a little too hard, and we put a lot of pressure on ourselves to do the most and can end up setting too high expectations. And so a lot of the times, that kind of need of how many words, does it need to be double spaced, how many citations do I need, what specific aspect? Like, being able to implement vagueness and variabilities and that kind of self-determined learning of "I choose what topic that I get to delve into within this specific area" can be really empowering, especially for people who have demand avoidance.

But making sure that you're providing a bit of structure and clear expectations can also really help making sure that students aren't setting themselves up for fail or burnout, or kind of going down a rabbit hole that's completely different direction, and clear structure really helps.

DARLENE: Yeah, that's great. Definitely. All right. We just had probably one other question we've got a quick moment for is "I'm guessing that all of these possibilities are all available for people having a diagnosis? How can this framework help for people who identify as being neurodiverse but don't have a formal diagnosis?" Anybody want to tackle that one?

TERRY: Well, that's really the whole point of universal design for learning. I always disclose to my students, and it makes them want to disclose to me. But I'm always, like, "No, no, don't tell me. It's fine. I want to make sure this course is available to everybody." So I don't ever ask students to divulge anything. I always ask them, "What can I do to make it better for you to learn in this class? Everybody." I don't say, "Oh, would the people who are a neurodivergent please let me know what I can do?" I just put it out there and I have a discussion board, because I think that it's important. A lot of students don't even know they're neurodivergent.

DARLENE: No, it's such a powerful thing. I think one of my first lecturers at university, the lecturer disclosed and explained the process and it was quite powerful. Many, many, many years later, I still remember that. It's quite interesting. Aaron?

AARON: As Terry was speaking towards within the presentation, it's like by using UDL and making the inclusive education frameworks, toolkits, practices, like, you do cater to everybody. So if students, no matter what age, or anybody, it's like they don't have access to a proper diagnosis because it is quite an expensive road to go down. It's like by implementing inclusive education practices, it can help the students who don't have access to it. Simply just by using inclusive frameworks.

And something else that I was going to say was, like, Josie's redesign, it breaks an assessment down into weekly steps. And by using that kind of framework for an assessment, that can help every student, no matter if they disclose or if they have a formal diagnosis. It helps every student. So it's like this can help mitigate those non-disclosed, or the students who may feel they are neurodivergent, but don't have access to diagnosis as well. So, yeah.

DARLENE: Yep. Excellent. And the stories in your presentation were so powerful. So, yeah, Josie's story, especially. Chantel.

CHANTEL: Yeah. I want to build off what Aaron is saying as well, in terms of making sure that people know that these accommodations, or these styles of learning, they're for everyone. And I think that there's this really kind of sense of otherness that comes with being disabled, or being neurodivergent, or being from any kind of marginalised background, that people can look at your experience from a very removed lens.

One of the activities that we do whenever we do events is we do a sensory profile. And a lot of it is just about getting people to understand that sensory overload and cognitive processing issues, it's not an isolated thing to neurodivergence. Like, I'm sure there's a lot of neurotypical people that find a very noisy room with a lot of people talking at you to be a little bit overwhelming. And it's about getting people to understand that accommodations aren't these special niche thing that are only available to a select few, and it's a very deficit mindset. And that's when you get that kind of competition. It happens a lot within workplaces as well, when some people need to work from home more often than others, for various reasons, whether it be chronic illness, or parenting, or being a carer, and things like that, and there can often be this bit of competition of "why does that person get that thing and I don't?"

Because at the end of the day, these accommodations benefit everyone. It doesn't matter whether they're disabled, or neurodivergent, or neurotypical, or anything, and it should be available and accessible to everyone, because it's not about needing to have this special paperwork or this special name or diagnosis, or something like that, in order to get support; it's just the basic premise that equity is about everyone getting the support that they need in order to thrive, regardless of whether they identify with some kind of special name or diagnosis or lived experience, because everyone, as a human being, deserves to be provided with support in order to effectively contribute to their communities, to their workplaces, you know, to the people around them that they love and they care for, because at the end of the day, that's the importance of community.

DARLENE: That's well said. Thank you. It's a great note to end on. So thank you so much for saying that so eloquently, Chantel.

We have gone over time. Just quickly before we finish up, we have a number of webinars coming up. We've got one on Find My Flow, which is a neuro inclusive e learning resource that will be a vendor demonstration from the UK. We've also got another fabulous webinar coming up called Building Community and Supporting Neurodivergent Students through study skills workshops from University of Adelaide. And then we've also got Accessibility and Office 365 that Microsoft are putting on for us.

So we've got quite a few coming up. So I hope that all those links are in the chat. Thank you so much, Team. It was informative. We can't wait for the resource. It's kind of like hyping up things before they come. As we've talked about previously, it's like getting a Christmas present and having a Christmas present under the tree, which is absolutely fabulous. So thank you for giving up your time so well, and for all the great work. I know we've recognised you in our awards last year, and I think you'll be there again this year, because the work you've done is absolutely brilliant. So thank you all for your time, and thanks to everybody around Australia for joining us. And thank you to the ADCET team, and for Jason for the captioning. Take care, all.