# Transcript: Student Equity Snapshots Forum

## ‘There's nothing inevitable about exclusion’. Choices and issues in career support for students with disability

SARAH O’SHEA: Welcome everyone. We'll just give it a couple of seconds while everyone enters the Zoom room. Just another 10 or 15 seconds before we get going.

Welcome to the final of our six Equity Snapshot forums. With our Fellows. Before we get going, I'd just like to start by acknowledging the country on which I'm currently located. today I'm located in the Dharawal Nation and I acknowledge with deep respect the traditional custodians of this land, the Whadjuk people. I pay my respects to Elders past present and emerging and to the Aboriginal community that continue to care for country. I stand for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language and history. And a continued effort to fight for Aboriginal justice and rights paving the way for a strong future.

My name is Sarah O'Shea, I'm the director of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education. NCSEHE for short. NCSEHE is housed at Curtin University and is funded by the Commonwealth Government with a dedicated mission to improve the higher education outcomes, access, participation, retention, success and completion for marginalised and disadvantaged people. We do this through a variety of strategies including research, practice and policy. One of our key programs is the Equity Fellowship Program and today I have the great pleasure of introducing one of our Equity Fellows, David Eckstein, who was awarded a year-long equity fellowship to explore – “There's nothing inevitable about exclusion”. Choices and issues in career support for students with disability.

As you would be aware this year has been particularly difficult with our Fellows experiencing various levels of lockdown and David located in Victoria has been in lockdown for the last few months and as you can imagine that has presented a lot of challenges for this research. But still he has managed to produce some really great preliminary findings. We have taken a slightly different approach to this presentation and asked each of the Fellows to prepare a short TED-style talk that focuses on a particular element of their research. This is followed by a live 'Q&A' session which today will be facilitated by Matt Brett — thank you Matt — who is a leading expert in this field.

Before we start, just a few housekeeping details. This webinar is being live captioned by Bradley Reporting and will be recorded. The recording will be available on the NCSEHE website in the coming days. To activate the closed captions, click on the CC button which is probably located either at the bottom or top of your screen. We Place have captions available by browser. If you have any technology difficulties please email NCSEHE@curtin.edu.au. Please start the session by going into the chat pod and introducing yourself. We have registrants from all over the country and beyond. Perhaps you too could acknowledge the country you're currently located on. Please choose all panellists and attendees so that everyone can read your post. But if you have a question, and we do hope you will participate through live questions, please add that question to the 'Q&A'. You can also vote on questions that are in the 'Q&A' box, posed by others. We have also received some questions prior to the session via registration so we may start with those and then move on to live questions. Without further ado, I'd like to now stop sharing my screen and hand over to Nina who will play our short video from David.

(video begins)

There’s nothing inevitable about exclusion.

We make choices about how we prepare our students for life after university. Especially our students who live with disability. And this idea that there is nothing inevitable about exclusion, is a key reason I work with people with disability. And it’s a persistent form of exclusion that prompted my research Fellowship. Because, compared to their mainstream counterparts, students with disability remain more likely to be unemployed after graduation. If they do get work they’re more likely to be in jobs that don’t use their university skills or education. And they’re also underrepresented in employers’ graduate programs – they make up only two per cent of participants in these important employment pathways.

We know that more targeted careers services for students with disability are needed in Australia, and we know that universities continue to experience barriers to providing them, but we don’t know why these barriers persist. These barriers include things like scarce resources and lack of service integration, but we don’t know why, as a sector, these things continue to be barriers to service provision. That’s what my Fellowship investigates. And there is nothing inevitable about this state of affairs.

My Fellowship’s findings are drawn from national surveys of students and staff, online staff focus groups and organisational case study interviews. Staff are clear about what they need. There’s a strong collaborative theme in the things that staff say would help them follow through on their desire to provide targeted careers services to students with disability. The top three things are: more collaboration with external stakeholders; followed by staff training; followed by more collaboration with internal stakeholders.

But there are things that complicate fulfilling these needs. And a big issue is that students and staff see student careers matters differently. Of course, you’d expect that because our experience is different. The thing to note is that as a body, we as staff could be much better attuned to how students with disability feel about their careers. We’ll look at three examples for now: personal career goals, an example of a career challenge, and how students with disability feel about engaging with it.

So first, personal career goals. Survey feedback suggests that at this fundamental level, there is a huge difference between students’ careers thinking and staff perception of it. For example, more than 70 per cent students with disability say YES, they know what work they want to do. But if you put the question to university staff — “in your opinion, do most students with disability know what work they want to do” barely 30 per cent of staff say YES. And, when asked about the challenges students with disability face getting the work they want: students and staff agree on the number one challenge, which is people making inaccurate assumptions about their abilities.

But staff and students don’t agree on the second most important challenge. Staff nominate unconscious bias, whereas students say it’s “being asked to share disability information with employers.” Sharing disability information with employers is a terribly fraught issue for many students. Approximately one third of students with disability indicated they feel able to do this, but only 12 per cent of staff thought students with disability would feel able to share their disability information with employers. So, as a group, we underestimate students’ willingness to engage with this challenge.

One project-based example of this kind of service integration is partnership with a Disability Employment Service provider (or DES for short). Currently, universities can host a DES provider on campus through the NDCO’s Uni Specialist Employment Partnership (USEP) program, or WISE Employment’s GradWISE program. These arrangements have helped some universities facilitate students’ access to disability-confident employers, and facilitate closer collaboration between disability services and careers education in the process. But entering into these arrangements can be complex for universities. There are 14 universities with DES partnerships. My Fellowship highlights there are key enablers that would help other universities develop relationships with DES providers, such as staff having access to: information about partnership guidelines and choices, and staff having access to precedent – examples of university collaboration with DES providers, and staff having access to a safe place to discuss issues with colleagues from early-adopter universities.

The emerging opportunity that the higher education sector has is to reduce the barrier of service separation by taking a more integrated approach to supporting the career development of our students with disability. And we can do this by tailoring activities that respond to the needs of each student. In the scheme of things represented by this picture, the student will occupy a different place in the support hierarchy depending on where they are at at the time, and depending on the particular careers issues they are dealing with. They might be using a little or a lot of support from different university areas such as the: Careers office, Disability, Work Integrated Learning, Academic Skills support, faculty, employers. But also each other. At Swinburne University for example, the students have been brought together to work in a student community of practice where they experience the benefits of belonging to a community of career development learners and the benefits of supporting each other. This more collaborative approach puts students with disability in more control of their career management when they leave university because they’ve been given a broader, more-informed careers base from which to transition to the world of work.

And this brings me to the point I’d like to finish on. The question for us as a sector is, how do we make this happen? Well, staff collaboration; enabling each other’s ability, sharing information and resources between universities, as well as departments, are key aims of the national Disability Career Development Learning Community of Practice that’s emerging from this Fellowship. You’re invited to come and experience this CoP online, at December sessions of the National Association of Graduate Careers Advisory Services (or NAGCAS) conference, and the Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability (or ATEND) Pathways 15 conference. There’ll be tips, discussion, and information sharing, about the issues and choices that city and regional colleagues have engaged with to develop targeted careers services for their students with disability to help you develop your own strategies.

By working together we can improve students’ ability to identify and get work that’s meaningful to them. We’ll be doing this at a national level. We’ll be helping them understand—and be valued for—their skills, abilities and professional aspirations. We’ll be making their inclusion more routine. And we’ll be doing this for students that would otherwise remain marginalised. This speaks directly to the higher education sector’s mission to be a civilising influence in society. It comes down to making these kinds of choices.

They’re choices we need to make. We can help each other in the process, and that’s what it means to say that there’s nothing inevitable about exclusion.

Looking forward to seeing you in the Disability Career Development Learning Community of Practice. Thanks for listening.

(video ends)

SARAH O’SHEA: I'm sure you'll agree that that was a terrific video and great overview of David's research to date. Now I'm going to pass over to Matt and David but before I do, a reminder they're we are taking live questions today and we have one question in the 'Q&A' at the moment, it would be great to get some more in there so that Matt can really quiz David on some of this research. Over to you two, Matt and David.

MATT BRETT: First off I'd like to congratulate the National Centre for what has been a fantastic week of Snapshot seminars and what a great note to end it on this week with David and Tim's work today.

We heard earlier today some really interesting work from Tim Pitman around just the volume of students with disabilities in the sector and some of the issues that they face and today we have heard from David around that transition to employment and the challenges there, I want to commend you David for what is an impressive presentation.

You kicked it off with also a really powerful quote, “There's nothing inevitable about exclusion,” and indicated that that has really motivated you to pursue this work. Is there something a little bit more? Is there something that really drove you to put your hat in the ring for this Fellowship and do the work that you’ve done, which is fantastic?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: Thank you Matt. Yes, there is. There's a couple of things. One of them was the history that I have working with students with disability since I began working as a careers consultant almost 10 years ago and the students showed me then right from the start just how responsive they are to modern ideas about career development and how courageously they engage with those things and how powerful social constructs of disability can be.

But then I had the opportunity to lead the implementation of the Accessibility Careers Hub at Swinburne University and when I was invited to do that it was the first time that I was able to concentrate and specialise in that work and to do nothing else and I think that was an opportunity really to experience the power of a ‘whole of organisation’ approach to this issue of providing careers support to students with disability, that really crystallised a lot more me because it involved collaboration with disability services. There's tremendous interest and enthusiasm from employers that was demonstrated to me over and again through the work done to help set up the Accessibility Careers Hub. Again, the responsiveness of the students, they just demonstrate time and again that if we create the right space for them, they teach us everything we need to know in order to help them and therefore this Fellowship — it was a really logical step to apply for this Fellowship, because my experience to date showed me that there is no one way of doing this that we have to be responsive to the array of needs, yes there are broad themes that the students present in the needs that they have but we need to become better as a sector at understanding those needs and how they present in different students and what works for some students and what doesn't work for others. It's been a long process, but things really came together in a big way for me. I've been given the chance to do that worked at Swinburne.

DAVID ECKSTEIN: That really shined through in what you have shared with us today David, some recurrent themes there around working together and collaboration, the distinct skill sets of DLOs and careers practitioners. With that experience, having that specialist careers focus, with the Fellowship itself, is there anything that surprised you, anything that's really challenged your assumptions as you have been given the opportunity to take a deeper dive in this domain?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: Yes, but perhaps it shouldn't have. But it did surprise me to discover, or just to see spelled out, the kind of disparity between staff and student perception and the extent of that disparity between the way in which student students understand their career challenges and the way that staff understand students with disabilities careers thinking. It's a huge difference. The exciting think about it is that we can do quite a lot quite quickly I think to remedy that situation and to be in more touch with our students.

One of the other things that did surprise me was the inadvertent barriers that embed in a way service siloing, despite our efforts to the contrary, and it's been well documented in the literature that providing careers support for students with disability is a specialist area. It needs to be recognised as such. Those are the arguments that are made. People are very alive to that. It says a lot about Australia's careers practitioners that they take these matters very seriously and it came up over and again in the various data streams for the Fellowship project, but we need specialist training, we don't have the required expertise, but that in itself can become a self-fulfilling barrier. In a way — if you'd forgive me for saying — I think the profession underestimates its readiness to take this next step and become upskilled to develop specialist expertise, not that everyone has to be a specialist in this area, but I think the way in which this concern about being adequately qualified conspires against us — it replicates an issue that industry experiences. It replicates an issue that our students experience and that we counsel them against and that issue is, “I'm not ready. I don't know everything yet. I'm not good enough. I'm not perfect. I'm not expert enough”. We don't need to be expert in order to take the first step. I think that issue is very informative for me and I think helps us a lot understand how we can take the next step so that was a huge surprise for me to discover that issue and have that spelled out in a number of ways by a number of different people.

MATT BRETT: I've got to say that that surprises me, some of the questions coming through in the 'Q&A' where for example we have Jane saying she finds it shocking that your survey indicated only 30 per cent of staff thought students with disabilities knew what sort of work they wanted to do and related to that from one of your former colleagues, questioning how do we get to this point? How is it that we got this disconnect between what students think of their sense of self, their aspirations for transition to employment and how staff are seeing things in such a difficult way?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: Well, I think that's a whole project all on its own and it would be one of the many fascinating things to follow up on but, at this point, in a way I think it's kind of logical that we find ourselves in this situation because the university environment is siloed. It's the way the institution has grown up or the way the sector has grown up I think. We have different areas of expertise and if I were to just sit with that for a moment, everyone has an opinion about careers advice and everyone has careers advice to give because we all have experience with careers. That doesn't mean that each other's careers advice is invalid, although it is a central — it is a foundation element of careers advising or careers counselling that aligns with current career development literature is that the student is the expert in their own circumstances so we don't tell them what to do. But it can feel very seductive to give people advice about what they should do based on incomplete knowledge of their circumstances and so therefore if you're in faculty, you'll have an opinion about what's useful for the student but if you're in disability services your professional focus is different and you're more alive I think to the issues that students with disability live with and so your perspective will be different. If you're a careers consultant your perspective will be different again and if you're part of the student support network then your perspective will be different again. It was another finding through the project was that, in some cases, the student’s external support network can end up pushing students into courses that they have no interest in or that they have no ability in because the objective overrides the student's own aspiration.

There's this ‘hornet's nest’ if you like of competing voices that make it very difficult for students with disability. But as I said, we can do something about this quite readily I think by acknowledging that difference instead of being deaf to it. That is something that would be very powerful I think and that would inform very achievable training, again as was suggested through the focus groups for this Fellowship, doesn't have to be yet another bit of compliance that people have to put up with but could be part of their existing work, it's just that by collaborating with colleagues we get help with it. So there's opportunities for the sector to upskill itself and I think that's particularly exciting. It's awful that we find ourselves on the one hand in this situation, but we have this tremendous opportunity to do something about it. I think we're uniquely poised to do something about it. Because these findings didn't come out of anywhere — out of nowhere I mean — they came on the back of generations of work, by dedicated professionals. In a way it's no accident that we're finding this out now because the ground has been prepared for so long that I think the sector is ready for this.

MATT BRETT: I want to pick up on this notion of silos. Often taken the view that universities are the ultimate silo organisation, it's comprised of distinct disciplines with their own conventions and traditions and they don't often speak to each other in a common language and even this week with the various Fellows with their presentations, we've seen various disciplinary traditions coming at equity issues from different vantage points, that's been a real strength of this week's presentations from my perspective. But, this notion of different skill sets or silos within disability support and career support coming together, it should be something that universities are adept at being able to manage because that's what universities are — collections of these silos of activities. Picking up on a question from Janine Delahunty, how do you get the common knowledge, how do you get the common language and discourse happening between two groups that are working side-by-side in universities?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: It started at Swinburne and thank you for mentioning Anthony because he's a key reason that I come to doing this work because it was his invitation to the careers office at Swinburne to collaborate that started it. Someone has to make the first move and I think that's the answer to the question, how do you get started? You take the first step. We take the first step with a spirit of collaboration, understanding that we don't know enough to have all the answers and we don't need them, because we do have — because the very reason that these silos exist. In the university, I once heard someone liken it to a modern city state. It has that many pockets of cultures and experience and expertise in it, how could it not be siloed? Universities have been working very hard for a long time to develop cross-faculty collaboration and I think this is a variation on a theme. The experience is there, I think.

MATT BRETT: Another feature of that bridging or getting common ground between cultures and areas of specialisation is in Work Integrated Learning. We have a question, exploring the notion of what Work Integrated Learning might do in terms of bridging the university silo and the industry silo in some ways as well. Which opens up a new field of collaboration with academic staff that are designing curriculum to support and enable that bridge. Does that pose issues, challenges, from your perspective and from your research around what role Work Integrated Learning might play?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: It also poses tremendous opportunities. Anyone who has worked in Work Integrated Learning will attest to the fact that disability is a highly relevant issue because there we experience the students' anxiety typically, or often, of not wanting to share disability information for very good reasons and for very understandable reasons. Because once you share that information you can't take it back. Some people who experience discrimination, it would be idle to pretend that doesn't happen. So that anxiety is very real. The difficulty it creates for people in Work Integrated Learning is that it compromises relationships with employers; it compromises the student's own learning when they enter an environment that is not prepared for them because they didn't feel safe to share the information required to make the necessary accommodations.

So there are opportunities to help students and employers better understand what's involved. It is something that requires concerted effort on the part of employers but as employers demonstrate to us, it’s something that they're interested in doing, it's something they're already doing and more enlightened employers are saying that we make accommodations for everyone, why shouldn't we make accommodations for people with disability? In fact we do and then they trot out the enabling communities that they run, the different ways in which anyway accommodate what some of them beautifully refer to as ‘individual work styles’ rather than accommodation for people with disability. The difficulty with Work Integrated Learning, or the challenge, can be taking away agency from the student and this resonates with some of the findings in the Fellowship because throughout it, students with disability demonstrate a spectrum of attitudes towards careers thinking and there are students who are very independent or highly agentic about their careers thinking and about the way they're preparing for their transition to the world of work. They do a lot by themselves and they consult and they draw on resources. And there are people at the other end of the spectrum who again, for very understandable reasons, feel that that's actually the university's job to get them work and so therefore I need to concentrate on my studies and again this is a whole other story that has a lot of complexity to it but the danger is for Work Integrated Learning that students hand over their responsibility and indeed there are requests or statements of just this kind of sentiment in the Fellowship findings. “Find me an opportunity”, this is the student voice, “find me the opportunity and negotiate the adjustments for me with the employer” and that might seem like a reasonable thing to do or a helpful thing to do but it denies the student with disability the opportunity to develop their skills in a safe place with that very difficult theme of sharing disability information with employers, negotiating adjustments. We have to use Work Integrated Learning as an opportunity to develop those skills, not deny them to the students.

MATT BRETT: Agree with that, absolutely. We have a question here from Nagari who wants more information about this challenge of disclosure. I might augment this notion of disclosure to employers with disclosure to the university as well because if we're to create a safe space where students can develop the skills and develop that agency to disclose and find ways of navigating their world and getting adjustments and support they might need, I wonder whether or not there is a distinction between getting the educational adjustments and the employment-related adjustments as well?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: I think that's a great question. It's a great point. In fact, inadvertently again through the different data streams from the Fellowship project, students make that very point. They inadvertently make that point. They link their student experience with their experience of the university with their degree of confidence to engage with the world of work and the issue of sharing disability information with employers comes up in that context and I think it's a very good point that, especially for students with disability who come from high school where they have been advocated for and they find themselves in a university setting where they have to advocate for themselves, nonetheless with the help of a disability liaison office, but they still have to advocate for themselves, they have to self-nominate. It's like a dry run for what needs to happen in the world of work. I think it can be made into very good practice to help students feel safe, having these kinds of conversations and also helping them understand the context that their experience of disability actually plays in the broader experience if you like. At university it's the course, in the workforce, it's entering a workplace and I think it's easy to overestimate the amount that people need to know and I think that's a good example of how relevant negotiating adjustments for university engagement can help with preparation for entering the workforce, because the university doesn't need to know everything about you in order to make adjustments for you. Yes, things need to be documented with a central point, with a disability liaison office in the way things need to be documented with HR if the organisation is going to interview you for a job but the faculty doesn't need to know details about your disability. The people interviewing you don't need to know details about your disability. The two things are very complementary and there's a lot of things we can use to help prepare students by drawing on their university experience.

MATT BRETT: We heard this morning from Tim Pitman again just the reminder of the volume of students that we're enrolling across the sector with disability and also encouraging us to adopt a universal design for learning approach. In this transition to employment, is it about adjustment, is it about having disclosed need, or is it about finding ways of making that interface in that transition from point as successful as it can be from a universal design for learning or universal design for employment perspective?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: I think it's both. I'm not quite sure if I have a handle on your question.

MATT BRETT: I might rephrase it a little. Some of the questions that have come through have had a theme about making adjustments for students with disabilities and disclosing to make those changes. Is there a world, or a way in which that transition to employment can occur where there is no need to disclose at all because everything the student might need is accessible and customisable to their own unique needs as a design feature?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: Yeah, that's the ideal we're working towards, absolutely. We need to be coming at it from both angles. I think we need a design approach to learning that assumes the presence of all equity groups, including students with disability but that doesn't mean that specialist support isn't also required in order to help students take advantage, and make the most, of the universally designed learning experience. I think we need to be doing both and there are people that argue that we shouldn't have specialist support. We should just be working towards a naturally inclusive environment. And the counterargument so that is that that means that you're asking the current generation to wait and that they can't be included yet and people associate this argument with the provision of quotas in the workforce and that we shouldn't have quotas because they're undesirable and they're evidence of the fact that the workplace is imperfect and we should instead be trying to change the workplace or we should be trying to do both I think if we're dealing with systemic discrimination, which is what people with disability experience. I think we can be smart and try and change the culture and the environment at the same time as we try to remove the systemic barriers in whatever way is practical.

MATT BRETT: I think for the participants here today, and throughout the course of this week, we wouldn't be here unless we were committed to some form of positive social change that's making the world more inclusive. You mentioned in your last response the notion of not abandoning the current generation and doing both at the same time, changing our practice and trying to change the world of employment as well. For that current generation that have been severely disrupted by COVID-19 and are going into a labour market that they may well have recessionary or even depression-like features to it, do you see — this is a question from Tim Pitman — do we see any COVID-19-related effects in terms of Work Integrated Learning, in terms of transition to employment for students with disability or is it too early to tell in terms of what your research has been able to identify?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: As to what happens next year, we need to wait and see but I think there's room for cautious optimism. Colleagues in industry liaison have told me that people are still running, organisations are still running, graduate programs. Some have stopped recruiting, others have not. I think there's a mosaiced response to COVID-19. The opportunity that the workforce has is to identify the barriers that exist in traditional assumptions made about work and that those traditional assumptions, such as having to front up to an office every day, have been shown to be baseless. And they provide, I think that learning provides the world of work with an opportunity to better embrace people with disability and to not fall victim. I say that because they miss out as well as the people who don't get work but the organisations miss out when they don't employ people with disability. I say very deliberately that they have a chance not to fall victim to the assumption that you need to engage in a traditional way just because it's been done that way. The opportunity that COVID-19 provides us with is to engage in a more productive way with people with disability to allow them to use the skills that they have.

MATT BRETT: Again just want to affirm and congratulate you for your approach David, because I think this focus on the positives, on seeing the opportunities and the enthusiasm with which you're approaching those opportunities I think is to be commended. We're getting a couple of questions coming through just to backtrack on this notion of self-disclosure and in some respects some universities and we have a question from Anthony saying that he's currently trying to automate or has automated the learning adjustment of learning access plans such that students can without having to disclose too much information about themselves just having information shared about functional implications of their circumstances are getting adjustments put in place almost in an automated fashion. We have another question that came through on the chat from Kelly suggesting that that there is a good — a sound basis for really promoting self-advocacy. I wonder, do you see a sort of tension; is it a little bit of both; are they mutually exclusive? Can you automate these processes but still inculcate and support student advocacy skills simultaneously?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: To the extent that students have to engage with the system for it to automate for them, it makes a parallel I think with the systems the world of work has in place for people when they make job applications. You have the opportunity to tick the box and to share disability information with an employer and I think that's the kind of system that Anthony and Kelly are describing. There's a whole conversation behind that though as to why a student or a prospective employee would want to do that just. Why tick the box and why share the information? What industry has learnt is that if they want people to do this, they have to be very clear about the reasons for asking for it. That's what we explain to students is for them to understand how their information will be used and if it's to be used simply to gather demographic data, OK, but if it's to be used to provide you with accommodations so you can do your best and demonstrate your ability, instead of wasting energy on trying to engage with a barrier, then that's a reasonable thing to do and I think there's it's a reasonable thing for a university that, by the way I think is being asked increasingly as a sector, or about to be asked I understand it, to make adjustments and reporting on accommodations for students with disability in irregular cycles, almost on an ad hoc basis. This automation will be necessary for the sector but I think it does have a benefit again if it's curated properly by the university for the purposes of student education, so we explain this is why we're doing it, these are the benefits and these are the things you need to consider, then I think it stands a chance of being positive for most people. It doesn’t mean we can assume that that will suit everyone and it doesn't mean that we can assume that people will follow through the cracks, so we still need the system to be driven by the kind of expertise that people like Anthony and Kelly have.

MATT BRETT: To echo some of your earlier responses — the work and the professionalism and the dedication that's been brought to the field of disability practice, careers practice and higher education overall means that there's a huge amount of knowledge and experience in these things. We can look to the future being very positive if we tap into those skills and bring it to bear to the problems that we're facing.

On questions of employment, there's two questions coming through the 'Q&A'. One picks up on this issue of what is the universities' responsibility to students with disabilities looking to progress to the labour markets. Jasmine is asking, do universities have a role as big employers to recognise the extent of exclusion in the labour market and preferentially maybe include more targeted programs of employing graduates with disabilities as part of their own employment practices?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: Yes. Absolutely. I think that's a great point. That's a fantastic point. Why shouldn't universities model the sort of engagement that we would encourage in industry? I think that's such a fundamentally important point. I really don't see how you could argue to the contrary. We're supposed to be repositories of learning, of expertise, of civilising influencers and we are those things. We have the opportunity to model inclusive practice and also therefore to become a source of better knowledge about the issues that this kind of inclusive practice involves because it's not necessarily straightforward, employing anyone is not necessarily straightforward. And so part of the work of Accessibility Careers Hub at Swinburne is just that, it's to provide one of a number of sources that exist of information for employers about how to be more disability confident and so I wrote a list of issues and I gathered information from the Australian Association of Graduate employers at one of their disability roundtables and you ask the question there, “What sorts of accommodations can employers make for applicants with disability?” The room might go quiet. After about 15 minutes, there is a storm of suggestions of things that they do already. I think that if the university as a sector does not proactively engage with this opportunity to have targeted recruitment programs for people with disability, then as an employer we risk being left behind.

MATT BRETT: Dare I say, missing out on some of the fantastic help that exists within the pool of graduates of disabilities. You mentioned before in response to COVID-19-related questions that everyone is working from home, I haven't set foot in the workplace for God knows how long. It's been a long time and there's some evidence that that's been positive for staff at universities. Did your research identify anything along those lines for students with disabilities, that they have found these COVID-19 times to be more conducive to preparing themselves for that transition to work?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: It wasn't something that I addressed specifically. The focus of the project was on the enabling factors and the factors that create barriers to targeted service provision for students with disability but students did volunteer anxiety as a result of COVID-19. They felt that universities weren't responding to them as well as they were before COVID-19 and I think also we need to acknowledge that the majority of students with disability in Australia that enrol, do so on campus and that — I'll go out on a limb and generalise but many people with disability spend their time completely occupied being engaged with their course and managing their disability. Work might come a distant third for some of them. University is an important means of contact and so taking that away is something that works well for some but creates an added load or difficulty for others. It's important to acknowledge that.

MATT BRETT: I think we are running short of time but just very quickly finish up, what's next, what's next for you and what's next for the Fellowship and some of the ideas you've been playing with and congratulations on what looks to be a fantastic piece of work?

DAVID ECKSTEIN: Thank you. Thank you again for joining me today. I really appreciate your company. Where do you start? To be prioritised for further research — that phrase gets quite a beating in the report, but I think the immediate things are the community of practice, I think that's really exciting and I think nurturing that, providing resources for it, is a key priority. The issue of multiple disability as opposed to someone experiencing a single disability appears to affect people's careers thinking but that's a very superficial appraisal and warrants, I think targeted research. There's a lot of research that could be done to help inform the issue of staff training, to identify which specific practices are actually the most effective in specific circumstances.

MATT BRETT: I might just jump in there. We are getting close to time. But again congratulations, well done. Look forward to that community of practice delivering some great dividends and having a world where the transition of graduates with disabilities to employment is a seamless and free of any disparities.

DAVID : Thank you. And Sarah and the Centre, thank you for having me. It's been a great year.
SARAH O”SHEA: It's been an absolute pleasure David and it continues to be a pleasure. Thank you both for just such a really interesting presentation, such fascinating insights into this field and we really look forward to your report coming out David.

I'm conscious of time but I did want to remind everyone that we do have all the webinars now up on the NCSEHE webpage and I'm just popping that up for anyone who may not be aware of where our website is. So, if you've not already engaged with the Centre, please do. Once you go on the website you will be prompted to enrol and get our newsletter. We send it out every six to seven weeks and it is just a way of keeping up to date with what is happening across the whole equity sector.

As we have said, this is our final webinar, we have had a terrific week of just the most diverse presentations. This is never anything that is ever possible without the work of a lot of people behind the scenes. I do want to acknowledge today the NCSEHE team, particularly Nina-Marie Thomas who has done phenomenal amount of work in the background. Those of you who actually asked for a booklet will hopefully have a hard copy booklet, or if not it will be coming very soon. The postal system has messed up our delivery a little bit. If you would like a booklet you can also view these online and if you ask Nina very nicely, she may even send you one!

We hope you've enjoyed this week of the Fellows Forum and we just want to thank everyone for their ongoing support and of course all our presenters for the week. With that, I'll say goodbye and thank you again Matt and David.

(webinar ends)