DARLENE MCLENNAN: Now we’re moving on to our first presentation. We’re very fortunate we were able to negotiate with the Department of Education Skills and Employment to have Rajan Martin join us today, the Assistant Secretary of Governance, Quality and Access Branch in the Higher Education division. Raj oversees and is responsible for the quality, equity, infrastructure, regional, rural and remote initiatives within higher education. I think all of us will enjoy hearing from Raj and what the commitment is from the government in regards to the higher education sector and disability. Deb is going to share your slide and over to you, Raj.

RAJ MARTIN: Thanks very much, Darlene. Before I start, I’d like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands on which we’re all meeting today and pay my respect to elders past, present and emerging. Thanks very much for that introduction. I’ve got a fair bit of content to cover today so I’ll try and move through that fairly quickly and have some time at the end for questions. There’s also an email address that I’ll show at the end if there’s other things we haven’t been able to cover or that I’ve run through too quickly if people need to follow up. The next slide, please? In terms of what I’m hoping to cover a little bit at the start just around what I look after and some of the other things that are happening in terms of broader background and context, talk a bit about the Disability Support Program and National Disability Coordination Officer Program in terms of the two existing programs in the branch and then spend a bit of time which hopefully will be of interest to members in terms of things that are coming on the horizon that will have a bearing on things, Job Ready Graduates package, bringing some changes around equity programs. There’s also the review process around the Disability Standards for Education as well some really exciting stuff around a new panel that’s been formed to develop a roadmap for equity over a five-year period and some work that we’re doing within the department to improve the evidence base around equity. The next slide, please? Very quickly, our department has gone through a number of changes. Earlier this year one of the changes was that Skills and Employment returned to the department. That’s been back and forth across different portfolios. What it does mean is that now within the one department you have right through from early childhood, schools, skills and higher education through to employment, quite a broad range of policies and programs that affect people throughout their life course. That provides a lot of opportunities I guess in terms of building those connections and from my perspective it’s from schools into higher education and other pathways and equally building better connections and I know that’s particularly an issue for people with disabilities, post-graduation transitions to work as well. The next slide, please? The things that I look after in my branch, I’ve got a team that kind of works with the regulator so TEQSA, Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency and also the Higher Education Standards Panel. That’s relevant because of things like the Higher Education Standards framework, how that places responsibility and so on to providers around the way in which they include different cohorts of students and so on. We’ve got a policy team focused specifically on equity so it has a broad remit across the different under-represented groups including students with disabilities. I’ve got a Program Management team that administers a number of the equity programs as well as a bunch of other ones around higher education infrastructure and so on and that’s where the DSP and NDCO programs sit as well as HEPP. Then I’ve got two teams that are focused on regional education issues and that’s been a particular focus of government following on from the final review that was finalised mid last year with government response mid this year. The next slide, please? This won’t be news to anyone and it does factor into some of the issues that have certainly been raised with me in terms of the extent to which funding has kept pace with growth in students with disability but also I guess provides a useful look around what the data is telling us notwithstanding there are challenges around self reporting and so on. I guess from a positive perspective seeing quite strong growth over the last 10 or so years so moving from about 4.3% in 2009 to 7.3% in 2019. As I said, that raises some issues around funding and the extent to which funding has kept pace with that but depending on the different figures of prevalence in the community, for me the question is how do we then continue to close the gap to ensure there’s parity between the broader population and the student population reporting disability, so first, I guess a slide around trends and also scales. The next slide, please? In terms of those two programs as I mentioned, the disability support program close to eight million each year and that’s really intended to be a contribution towards the costs of higher education providers undertaking inclusive activities for students. I don’t think it was ever intended to be meeting full costs but, as I said, we need to be mindful of the extent to which and some of the changes which I’ll talk about to that program, how that’s playing out in the sector. The next slide, please? Some of the changes I’ve got a couple of slides on that, expanding out so that providers can claim reimbursements around some of the staff training costs and some of the costs associated with modifying course content and so on, trying to reduce administrative burden so moving from the heavy sort of claims focus to distribution now based on a university’s relative share of students with a disability and only requiring claims for support and equipment over 10,000. The next slide, please? Some of the changes, and this was based on consultation that’s now a little while ago so I think it was in late 2016, but shifting from the old system which as I said heavy claims focus, large volume of cost claims and high administrative burden to a newer system primarily driven by enrolments. Our understanding and the data that we’ve seen suggests that that is in a simpler, more stable and transparent way of the relative distribution of those funds between different providers. The next slide, please? Those changes commenced 1 January 2020 but because of, I guess, the delay between when some of that data comes through and so on that will be then reflected in terms of payments we make next year, so I guess acknowledging that while that’s been in place for close to 11 months now but then the payments associated with that then flow in the following calendar year. The next slide, please? A quick one just I guess acknowledging the important role of ADCET, that is something that we certainly value and are very pleased to be able to increase funding to ADCET to 150,000 from the previous 75,000 and also there was, from memory, 96,000 we were able to make available to ADCET to support activities in the sector responding to COVID. That’s a brief acknowledgment of ADCET. The next slide, please? I’m just conscious of time so I’ll move quickly. NDCO, again people in this audience would know very well so 15 host providers, 31 regions. The next slide, please? For me the critical thing is previous evaluation. This is a long running program and the recommendation around shifting to a more strategic focus so the past, quite a long while now, there’s been a conscious effort from the department’s perspective around raising program activities to a more strategic level. The next slide, please? I guess that imperative remains and so one of the things that we’re interested in looking at more closely is how the structure of the current program then either supports or potentially any changes that might need to be made to effect to give effect to that need to have that more strategic focus. Whether or not those sorts of 31 individual regions and the level at which they engage and the extent to which that meets that ability to support a shift to a more strategic focus, so nothing concrete in that. That is something that we remain interested in and will certainly be consulting with the sector as we explore that further. The next slide, please? So, a couple of changes not specific to disability but I guess in the broader equity context, the Job Ready Graduates package was announced 19 June. It passed through Parliament not that long ago but has some changes. This slide talks about the Indigenous Regional Low SES Attainment Fund, so it will combine HEPP, regional loading and enabling loading. Those existing programs will continue and funding will continue to be distributed in line with that through to 2023 and during that period we’ll work with the sector to look at any refined funding or distribution arrangements post 2023 so commencing in 2024. The next slide, please? The other one is changes to the HEPP program. That’s broadened out now to include Indigenous and regional and remote students in terms of their eligibility and also the formula that drives distribution between different institutions. That commences in 2021 but with a phased implementation and support through the transition phase to remove any possibility that institutions will receive lower funds in aggregate over time. There’s also a Regional Priorities Pool which runs alongside the National Priorities Pool. The next slide, please? I’m trying to go fairly quickly to make sure there’s a bit of time for questions.

DARLENE: Darlene here, we haven’t been rushed off our feet with questions but if anybody does have a question put it into the chat pod, thank you.

RAJ MARTIN: Thanks, Darlene. Disability Standards for Education, a very important document. They, I guess, run alongside and interrelate with the Higher Education Standards. Every five years they go through a review process so that review is under way. The next slide, please? I was very lucky to be able to be part of those consultations including ATEND and other key stakeholders in the sector. That consultation period ran from 17 July to the end of September and the intent is that the final review report which had been dealt with in another area of our department, a specific taskforce looking at that, will be provided to the Minister by the end of the year for consideration by all governments early next year. The next slide, please? One of the interesting new developments is that there’s a new Equity and Higher Education Panel that’s been formed. It’s a high level body, so includes a number of Vice Chancellors as well as other senior people with experience in equity. The primary task that they have is to develop a student equity and higher education roadmap. That’s very much the headline, high level document that we’re looking to engage the sector broadly in terms of setting out a clear plan for how we have an increased focus on improving outcomes for under-represented groups over that five-year period. The next slide, please? It will do all the things that roadmaps usually do, so setting a vision, prioritised plan and raised profile in development. The next slide talks to some of the consultation processes but that’s a very high priority and high focus for my branch at the moment. The next slide, please? One of the things that’s been emphasised by that panel is the need to consult very broadly and in a co-design sort of fashion. We’re very keen to engage with you and this sector. If we can go to the next slide, please? We’re looking to do that through a variety of different ways over the coming period. Initially there will be a discussion paper. We’re working with the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education to do a range of other things to get much better engagement and access to student cohorts and others that we ordinarily wouldn’t through a sort of standard discussion paper process, so a series of surveys, virtual roundtables and, as I said, working with the National Centre to actually consciously try and get much broader and deeper engagement than we otherwise would. The next slide, please?

DARLENE: Raj, we’ve just one minute to go. Thank you.

RAJ MARTIN: The very last thing was in parallel with that focus on the roadmap, we’re also doing a number of things through the evidence base around equity. I’ll run through it very quickly but one of the things we’re doing is a scoping study to inform the next post school destination survey. That’s making sure that we have the right coverage and the right questions to make sure we have robust evidence in that longitudinal study to inform equity outcomes. The other one, I won’t run through the slide, is we’re doing some work to establish an evaluation framework really for equity practice, primarily structured around the HEPP program. Both of those in conjunction are trying to build the evidence base, make sure we have a really robust set of information to work from and to then target both future activity and to the extent it’s available any future investment into the equity space. Thanks very much. I think I’ve zoomed past the last couple of slides and right at a quarter past.

DARLENE: Thank you, Raj. I’m sorry we haven’t got time for questions. We’ve only had one question in the chat box. If we get any more, are we right to put that to your office and see if we can get some answers for those people?

RAJ MARTIN: Yes, sure, the email address that’s on the screen now, Darlene, whether or not you want to coordinate or if people want to individually just write in.

DARLENE: Excellent. Thank you very much for your time. Have a great day. Thank you, it’s fantastic.