ELICIA: And now I would like to introduce our next presentation, which will be given by Anthony Gartner by La Trobe University and Dr Lisa Stafford, Queensland University of Technology. This presentation is about the National Disability Strategy and Tertiary Education. Anthony Gartner is a social worker by background and recently joined La Trobe as Manager of the AccessAbility Hub after 14 years at Swinburne. Anthony is passionate about positive employment outcomes for people living with disability and imagines the day when Australia sits at the top of the OECD list for employment outcomes for people living with disability. Dr Lisa Stafford is a passionate social scientist, community planner and human geographer who specialises in inclusive communities, social-spatial justice for people with disabilities, and participation and transitions journeys of children and young people with disabilities. Lisa specialises in inclusive participatory research and community engagements methods. Lisa is a senior lecturer and ARC DECRA fellow in School of Public Health and Social Work, a program leader of ecologies of justice centre for justice and Co-chair Disability Inclusion Action Plan Working Group at QUT. Lisa has over 20 years of involvement in the field across government, non-government and academia, and in various practitioner, management and executive level roles. Lisa identifies as a disabled-chronically ill person and is a full member of Planning Institute of Australia, institute of Australian Geographers and Disability Leadership Institute. I will now hand over to Anthony to introduce the session.

ANTHONY: Thanks, Elicia. I just have to find all my screens. I have so many screens running. Good afternoon, everyone. This presentation is actually an audio recording. Lisa and I met a couple of weeks ago and we recorded this because Lisa is unable to be here today. So the invitation is just to sit back, relax, close your eyes if you can and just listen. Hopefully you will enjoy the conversation or the - watch the captions but there won't be any actual images to display. I have prepared some PowerPoints and they will be available on the website and they will provide links to the documents that we are discussing today, and some of the information about that. I did want to just - I don't know if you will be able to see that - there is a photo of Lisa. Can you see that? Not sure. And there is a photo also of myself. You will notice that Lisa has a walking stick in her hand and you will see in my photo that I'm sitting at the base of a set of very long stairs. The irony on the International Day of People Living with Disability is that when I was first diagnosed with MS in 2006, one of the first things I did was sold my apartment because it was on the third floor and I never wanted to face the indignance of not being able to walk up my own stairs. Life has a way of playing out in very strange ways because I can still walk up the stairs, thankfully. I'm now going to put on the recording, and hopefully you will be able to hear that, please let me know via the comments if that's not the case. I’m the Manager of the AccessAbility Hub at La Trobe University at Melbourne and my colleague today.

LISA: Dr Lisa Stafford. I'm a senior lecturer and ARC DECRA Fellow at QUT in the School of Public Health and Social Work.

ANTHONY: We are here today to talk about the National Disability Strategy and Tertiary Education. Lisa, why do you think we have a National Disability Strategy? How is it important to us in the tertiary sector?

LISA: I think, you know, the National Disability Strategy was introduced in 2010 to 2020. So it is a high level strategic policy framework. That's really important for Australia, in terms of clear identity in the, I suppose, approach to how we address really systemic barriers that people in the disability space across all aspects of life. And so there's six key policy priority areas. Educational learning and skills being one of those, which is policy area 5. So, you know, it does really count for us in terms of the higher education, thinking about not just the day-to-day of how do we support students to succeed in higher education, but what does that mean, in terms of broader thinking about what inclusive education looks like and where we go in terms of the future. And that's where at the moment, the current discussion papers around is the development of the beyond 2020 National Disability Strategies. At the moment, and that's where we got connected through the roundtable we were at, around this conversation about how do we actually start looking at changing attitudes around inclusive education and particularly how it relates to the tertiary sector. And I know, Anthony, that ATEND put in a specific submission to that. Do you want to talk a little bit about, you know, what those key areas were?

ANTHONY: Yeah, Lisa. We did put in a submission. We made a range of key points. We put the submission together because we feel that effectively what's missing from the National Disability Strategy is expectations. They're very low in Australian policy frameworks at the moment, expectations about and for and of people living with disability are often very low. So the National Disability Insurance Scheme - there is no education strategy at all in the National Disability Strategy, there's an education strategy but Lisa you mentioned there's only one metric that’s been developed for that national strategy, which is engagement. So - - -

LISA: Yeah.

ANTHONY: - - - there's nothing there about success or retention or completion or outcomes. So ATEND put in a submission really so we could raise some of these questions with the Federal Government and stimulate some thinking. What do you think is missing from the strategy, Lisa?

LISA: How we actually consider education and for many students with disabilities - and this is from first through to where we are in terms of higher education it's a really extensive journey, and one that requires this expectation, you know, the expectation that all students with disability should have not just access to education but access to inclusive education that whatever their chosen path is, that they have the full potential to reach that idea about full participation. But that requires setting that expectation and not just the access to schooling but what that schooling looks like. And how much discussion or is there even mention of the universal design for learning principles that are really significant and really shape and change the way we think about education, not just about adjustments and access, but a whole different way of approaching that learning is about that it should be for all and from the get-go, right at the beginning, that we're designing education programs and tools and curriculum that is about inclusive for all. And that we don't have to do the complex adjustments that we've talked about that is sort of the day-to-day experiences at the moment, and I think that's a really important journey for us to make is that real transition between access to just education or engagement. Like, what does that look like, to fundamentally about that every student has a right to quality education that is from the beginning inclusive for them. With maybe adjustments for any specific needs. Yeah, I think that's a really important change that we're required to do. That we should be demanding the Australian Government to actually embrace and lead with.

ANTHONY: In the sector we've been talking about universal design for learning, UDL principles for years now. But we don't seem to be actually getting any closer to having them. We make little incremental things. And I just wonder what is it going to take for us as a sector to start actually embedding universal design in our conceptualisation of how we educate people, rather than what we all do now which is retrofit universal design into all of the curriculum and all of the content. What will it take for us to change?

LISA: It starts with that real broader cultural level change. How do we actually even see students with disabilities, in terms of being in education, higher education. We still have so many barriers, really systemic barriers preventing students with disabilities, not just getting to university, TAFE and tertiary systems, but succeeding in those systems.

ANTHONY: Mmm.

LISA: And part of that comes back with culture. It's a significant culture change, we still have models that see disability in a caring framework, medical model frameworks, and not in terms of a rights-based equity frameworks, which is really significant because it starts demanding structural changes that are oppressing students from a range of avenues getting to in and then out, you know, those key transition points as part of that education journey, but that starts as a culture. What do each university say about disabilities? Are they recognised and seen as key students that have the same rights as every other student coming into university? I think that's a really key starting point. And that's where I think if we all get involved with the National Disability Strategy and put pressure on, that we demand that significant change, at that strategic policy level that then requires universities, beyond the national - we have disability standards at the moment for education since 2005. How well does that embrace universal design learning? I don't know. From your experience, Anthony, you've been involved for a long time.

ANTHONY: I think we've heard about universal design for learning for so many years but that the changes are so incremental and slow that it's hard to even notice it happening. We've just come up with an innovation at work where photocopying instead of producing image-based PDF, the photocopier will actually produce a text-based PDF, a simple change that requires some additional software installed but the photocopier vendors are doing that, working with us in that, and it means that everything that is photocopied in the university no longer is an image-based PDF but as a text-based PDF, meaning it's accessible from the get-go. Now, that is something that fundamentally changes the accessibility of our documents, but it's only just happening now in 2020. And we've had the software to do that, to enable that for years. We've just not been using it. And I think one of the things about the development of a National Disability Strategy is it has to be really thinking about the future. I'm not sure that we do that particularly well in the education sector. We think about the next step. We're funded for the next 12 months if we're lucky. But we don't think about what does education in 10 years look like. Or in 150 years, what does education look like? Because that's what needs to be built into the national strategy, is how could education be and how would we get there? So even as they're building a 10-year strategy at the moment, have we asked the question: what does education in 10 years look like? How will it be different? Will we be doing exactly the same thing? And then how will that meet the needs of five-year-olds today?

LISA: Fundamental, isn't it? And I was just thinking - and I know what we talk about - and, you know, yes adopting that nationally but also when we think about the sustainable development goals, there's a clear indicator in 2030 that there's going to be removal of poverty, we're going to achieve equity and people with disabilities is one of the key groups identified in the sustainable development goals around – and education being specifically one of those is guaranteeing equal and accessible education by building inclusive learning environments that provide the needed assistance for people with disabilities. So how close are we to that in terms of - that's 2030 we're supposed to be achieving that goal, and all global communities, these goals are about. It's not just developing countries or our global self, this is all countries should be achieving this and Australia has committed to the sustainable development goal. So where we are in terms of that broader goal of 2030?

ANTHONY: Do we even reference those goals? I know we get ranked on our participation in the sustainability goals by the times. There's a global ranking system for how universities respond to the sustainability goals. You get to choose which goals you want to focus on out of the 17, you get to choose three that you will be ranked on. How do they actually trickle down to the practice level? My practice has not yet been informed by the sustainability goals. And when I first learned about them recently, you know, they've been around for five years but I haven't engaged with them until recently, and that's my bad, but I thought they're not informing my practice. They're not shaping the vision that we have. And maybe they should be. Maybe we, as a sector, need to be taking more consideration of the sustainability goals and look at how they actually inform our practice and how they would help us to make strategic decisions in terms of what our priorities are, particularly as we move into 2021 with reduced budgets and reduced staffing levels.

LISA: Again, you know, how does the National Disability Strategy connect to the sustainable goals. So that's a gap as well. If at a strategic level we're not demanding people to make those broader connections and our monitoring and indicators aren't collecting or reporting against those really high level frameworks, it also connects directly to the United Nations Convention of Rights of People with Disabilities. Then we're starting to lose the emphasis and also the broader rights-based approach that's so critically important to actually addressing these broader systemic barriers that we've been dealing with for a very long time. And as you said, there has been some really good individual case stories, has there been broad level change? No.

ANTHONY: We can see - I mean, we can look around and see that, yes, there has been a lot of change if we go back 40 years to the process of deinstitutionalisation of people living with disabilities.

LISA: Absolutely.

ANTHONY: And that was incredibly significant.

LISA: Mmm.

ANTHONY: And so we shifted location but I'm not sure that we actually shifted conceptualisation in the same way. And I feel like we still hold that kind of 19th century welfare model of doing for. It's a very paternalistic sort of model and I think it's reflected in the disability standards for education. I think it's reflected in the National Disability Strategy. It's reflected in the NDIS that doesn't have an education strategy at its heart. We have these kind of paternalistic sense that we have to look after people with disabilities, we have to care for them, but we can't really expect too much of them.

LISA: Mmm. Yeah.

ANTHONY: And so our policies, they're not visionary. They're not visionary about what is possible about, you know, why is Australia the last survey ranked 23 out of 27, in terms of employment outcomes for people living with disability in the OECD. I think those are the numbers, but - - -

LISA: Yeah.

ANTHONY: - - - we live in an incredibly resourced and rich country. Why have we got such poor outcomes for people living with disability? It's inexcusable.

LISA: Yeah.

ANTHONY: And yet we're doing it. You know, we've got the USEP program, we’ve got the GradWISE program, two great examples of initiatives that are attempting to change the employment outcomes for people with disability but do we, as practitioners, as academics, where is our thinking? Are we looking to the future and what that might be, or are we still informed by the past and what it was?

LISA: Yeah. Absolutely. And I know we were having this conversation about, you know, so much of the talk, even in the employment policy that is there, so much is about job or work placement. We don't talk about careers. We don't talk about, you know, that higher level expectation and supporting people than in those career development. We just don't do it. Don't invest. And how realistic or how good are our open pathways into the tertiary area? You know, there has been so many profounded packs, we know with TAFE, the vocational system, how the impact that has been and what has that meant in terms of the erosion of those open pathways through where some people have used TAFE and into tertiary, what has happened there? And also the pathways into higher education. How well are we really embracing and actually talking to students and setting that up, and particularly for students that aren't in the traditional year 12 getting their studies and stuff like that, for those students who for a whole range of different reasons haven't been able to get into those areas, who are doing home schooling, flexi-schooling or have had to be into special education because of the exclusion that they've incurred in secondary. What happens to students that have all the potentials? Yeah, I worry. And I think that's where we have a lot of work needed to invest in and start opening those conversations up again. And, again, there's some great little programs - I know we've done in our research - around transition, education to work transition for young people with disabilities. And there are some really good stories, as you said, that you see in pockets of education that's happening. But, again, they're just pockets and small examples. Why can't they be broader and scaled up and become the everyday, rather than just isolated examples?

ANTHONY: I guess if there's a summary of today's conversations, it's really about an invitation for practitioners to think about how our work is informed by the sustainability goals, how our work can inform the National Disability Strategy, and how we can use that to actually expand our thinking about what is possible for people living with disability, how we can actually work to remove barriers and really implement the UDL principles, and in an effective and whole-of-institution way. Folks, we've actually run out of time now. So we will have to say farewell but thanks for participating in our conversation today.

LISA: Yeah. Thank you. Thanks, everyone.