SPEAKER: I would like to welcome to our screens Amelia – is Amelia Dowe there? Doug McGinn, Debbie Hindle, Carol Devereaux and Alexis Smith. All these people are from the University of Tasmania. Welcome and thank you for being with us in our last break away session. We’re looking forward to your presentation today, Emerging Model for Cross-Team Collaboration: Disability and Student Learning at the University of Tasmania. So, this sensational group are going to share progress towards a model of integrated student support between the disability and student learning areas at the University of Tasmania that you have gleaned over the last two years. Thank you very much, all of you, for being with us and I look forward to your presentation.

AMELIA DOWE: Thank you so much and thank you so much for having us, especially in this final session. Today, there will be three of us presenting: myself, Amelia, Carol Devereaux and Alexis Smith, they’re here with me as well. I will just - I lost my mouse. Here we go. We will introduce ourselves first and then tell you what we're talking about. I'm a student learning adviser. Our main job is to help students develop their writing skills, English language skills, academic skills. I've got this picture on the right-hand side of the screen of a whole lot of messy Lego blocks. They're all different colours and shapes and it's just chaos. I often use this picture to talk with people about what I do in my job because it can take a little while to work through the mess of a university assignment or working out exactly what you need to do to - well, write your assignment or do something like that. There are these little building blocks that you've got to find and put together and create your thing, so we're helping create something ordered from the chaos.

CAROL DEVEREAUX: Hi, everyone. Thanks for joining us today. I hope we live up to our introduction. The last is the best. I'm not sure about that but, anyway, we will do our best. I'm Carol Devereaux. I'm one of the disability advisers within Accessibility Services and I'm based in the south of Tasmania. Basically, we're servicing our students’ needs university wide, no matter where they are. Our role is really to meet with students who have disclosed, with them unpacking their needs within the study context of uni. My picture that I've chosen has a range of rocks. They're all different but sort of all the same but all different. I think that sort of really exemplifies what we deal with on a day-to-day basis. Often, we are the first contact for our students. So, trying to ascertain the scope of services and supports requires a really, really important part of our role just to try and ensure students are successful with their study at our institution. And over to Alexis.

ALEXIS SMITH: Hi, everyone. I'm Alexis, I'm the Accessibility Liaison Officer, which is sort of - it means I am a bitza. I do a bit of everything at the moment, a lot of admin around the disability support area. I also see students in a sort of supervised disability adviser capacity during peak times but my main focus this year has been around implementing access, which is our new database that we're using for accessibility services and that's what we're generating our learning access plans through. Yeah, just been sort of putting that into the UTAS system and making it work for us. I chose plants because I love plants.

AMELIA DOWE: Excellent. Thanks so much. So, today, we're going to be talking about the way that we've been working together across student learning and disability and, as the title said, it's really a work in progress. We've been working together over the last couple of years, and part of the reason we wanted to come to Pathways and talk about what we've been doing is because we would love to hear about what you're doing as well, working across teams and how you've gotten things to work really well. We will be speaking about students with specific learning disabilities mostly and how we've worked together. First off, the disability team's perspective, then my team's perspective on problems and then some solutions, a short, tiny case study and then we would like to leave a fair bit of time for discussion if people have ideas and thoughts. On this next slide, I've got a picture of a pencil that's been sharpened from both ends. This really is sort of what we had been doing before we got started. There was a problem but we were approaching it separately in our own ways. But what we've been trying to do is work together and sort of combine our efforts and make a difference to the student experience and make sure people are getting the support they need. I will hand back to Carol now to talk about her perspective and what's been going on.

CAROL DEVEREAUX: Okay. Thanks very much, Amelia. So, as a disability adviser, you never really know who is going to walk through your door and what issues you're going to be presented with. Students, as we know, come from very diverse backgrounds with a range of experiences and conditions and it's not uncommon for students to present with a myriad of different issues that span a range of disability types and situations. I've been into a couple of sessions in the last couple of days where that's been talked about quite a lot, so it's really important that we understand that. Now, our role as a disability adviser is to try and unpack these and gain some understanding of the challenges that the university study environment does present for those individual students. Now, that's quite an ask in a 50-minute time slot when you consider we're not only providing a very receptive and empathetic ear but we’re also trying to gain enough detail about the student to make some professional and informed decisions regarding the services and supports that we can offer. Now, we want to ensure that the student has an enjoyable and a successful experience as they move into this university sector. And, for many, even disclosing about their disability or their health condition can be a real challenge, we're obviously very mindful of that fact. Now, in the majority of cases, what we do is develop a learning access plan, this is developed in conjunction with the student and it does provide a formal document outlining the reasonable adjustments within the study context. This is usually a rather concise document outlining the nature of the condition, the impacts on study, and then any agreed adjustments that can be made. With the University of Tasmania version, this also does require final approval from the relevant college responsible for that student's course of study. Now, the Learning Access Plan will provide details about classroom considerations, exam adjustments, extra writing time, resting time, timetabling, et cetera, et cetera. However, it does not always meet all the needs of students. And as part of our role, we need to then determine what are the other university services we can introduce to the student to help support them through their study journey? This is when we often need to refer to other teams for support and expertise and includes those services such as counselling and student learning supports. Now, what we have found is that one of the key emerging student cohorts are those students who disclose regarding specific learning disabilities. So, alongside the development of the LAP, we often find the need for referral to learning supports and, hence, the growing interaction we've found between disability services and student learning services. Thanks, Amelia. Can you just go to the next slide for me? So, it's often very easy for a student to get lost in these processes within a uni. There's no one-stop-shop, so linking students with the services that can assist is a really crucial part of ensuring their success. The uni environment is often a whole new world and the adjustments and transitions for students can be really difficult, especially for those who don't feel really confident in this learning environment. They may find it difficult to ask when they're not sure about processes or service areas and the university is often presenting a whole new model of support, one they're probably not used to at all. Without creating some connections for those students, they may not always get the help they actually need. So, part of our task then is often around explanation about how support services work within the university context and then providing a more personalised link to these services. We find that this can help with their confidence and also provides pertinent information for the student learning team. What I would like to do now is hand back to Amelia and she will provide some information from the student learning perspective.

AMELIA DOWE: Thank you, Carol. So, from the student learning perspective, I will just start back to how it was maybe two years ago when students came who had specific learning disabilities. In general, the student learning advisers didn't know how to help. We didn't know how to use our skills, really, to help these students. We didn't know what tools were available for them, so what sort of software might be helpful, what the university already had, and by the time the student walked out of the door, we often felt like we hadn't done anything very useful at all. We also found that, sometimes, the referrals didn't have the context that we needed. Sometimes, we were unsure why a student had come, because disclosure can be quite difficult, and it's also then within a context that's unexpected. So, if someone goes to see a disability adviser, the topic is already decided. You're going to talk about a disability or some kind of challenge you're having in your studies. When a student comes to see a learning adviser, they then have to bring up that topic from scratch. If we don't know that's what they want to talk about, they have to do the hard work of talking about this thing. Sometimes, I would find that students, just as they're walking out the door, would say, "Oh, by the way, I have dyslexia." Oh, okay. That's a good place to start the next time you come along. That trust building really can take time and we found that we were often on the backfoot with that. So, some of the things that were making this difficult were the university communication processes between teams, they were quite complex and quite time consuming. And all of these issues just really culminated in quite a reactive approach to support. There would be a problem and we would be scrambling to work out how we could fix it. So, we've really tried to improve this over the last few years collaboratively, like through improving our communication and that type of thing, come up with a range of solutions. And, of course, it's still in progress but the main thing is that it's been a collaborative approach through improving our communication. For some of us, this is pretty informal or sometimes we're setting up meetings or working on a specific issue that's come up but two of the main things we've done are improved or personalised that referral process Carol will speak about in a moment and worked on knowledge sharing and capacity building, particularly in my team. I will hand back to Carol.

CAROL DEVEREAUX: Back to me, yes, thanks. So, let's join some of those dots for our students. Referral. Now, there's referring and there's referring. With some students, you can simply provide the information about the supports and that's enough. They will go, they will seek the support they need when they need it. However, for others, it's really important that we provide a more concrete link with the service area and the people who are going to offer that support. We tend to call these hard or soft referrals. I'm sure everybody does the same. But the important thing is that the referral suits both the student and the practitioner, so we've tried not to be too prescriptive about how we go about this. Now, one way is to organise a joint appointment. That's where the disability adviser, the student and the student learning adviser would be brought together and it would be almost like a handover session. So, the disability adviser would organise that, they would, perhaps, be part of that initial meeting for the first few minutes, giving and encapsulating some of the key strategies around what they felt might be required without, as I said before, being too prescriptive because that's really then going to be up to the student and the student learning adviser, but it is a good way of basically making that introduction to the service. Another way would be sending an email introduction. So, the DA provides pertinent information via email to the student learning adviser, but, of course, copies in the student so they're aware of the information that's being passed on, and this is only done with student permission. So, that way, you know, the student is feeling, “Okay, I've had that discussion with the DA, I've now been linked via this email with this other person who I don't know but they're supposed to be able to help me.” One thing we found, especially with Amelia, and I will give her 10 out of 10 for this, it's really important that the student then feels really welcomed by that new support person. Amelia has often responded just with a quick little email to a student from the original DA contact, just introducing herself and letting the student know she's looking forward to meeting them. That in itself can be a really constructive and positive way for the student to then feel, "Okay, this is all going to be okay." We've also found, at times, that we as practitioners need to stay in touch with how that student is then going. There are times when students are referred back to disability services, perhaps in the context of amending or updating their Learning Access Plan or perhaps it's around other supports and services that we need to be offering. It's not really just a handover and forget, it's then a collaborative way of working with students so that they feel they can come to either of us or other services and that we will be there to help meet their needs. So, it's an ongoing and an evolving process. Thanks, Amelia.

AMELIA DOWE: Thank you. So, when it comes to building capacity, that's been pretty huge for our team. As student learning advisers, we're language experts and a lot of us have a background in English language education but knowing how we can use those skills and to sort of reequip a little bit to work with students who have specific learning disabilities, dyslexia, it was a little bit out of our understanding for a little while. And so, we've gone through a process of formal and informal training. I was very lucky to go to an assistive technology day in Launceston a couple of years ago which just changed our world. I went and learnt a whole lot about the software and support that's available and have been able to gradually share that with the team. I made some little videos - well, sort of recently - that can be sent out with that early referral process, which just sort helps give people a jump start with what they need to do and, of course, ADCET and the amazing resources and webinars. There's a lot of stuff out there but there’s also some really amazing, generous individuals around the place. So, through our Social Inclusion Community of Practice at the university, we've been able to get in touch with people who are skilled in this area and who know a lot about dyslexia. They've run some in-house training for us specifically for support staff, which has been amazing, and we've gone to days organised by Dear Dyslexic and that kind of thing. It's almost been like a drip feed of little bits over time that have really improved what we're able to do and then, of course, sharing practice however we're able to do. This means that when we do workshops or when we do consultations, we're feeling much more confident about what we can do and how we can shift and use those existing skills we have to support another group of students. So, we incorporate information into our mainstream programs about the software that's available, the other support that's available and we're pretty proactive in how we share information. I'm just trying to keep an eye on the time. The other really great thing that's happened is a student network. One of the disability advisers who was working with us created a student network. They called themselves the LD Legends. They've now formed a student society with a student union. They are a really fantastic support network for each other and it's been a good network to be sort of sharing advice with. To begin with, our role there was to just support them as they were going through but now they're pretty independent. Actually, soon, they're running an online session for preservice teachers on how they can support students with learning disability, so it's really kind of gone full circle. Our future steps. At the moment, we've been able to achieve a fair bit through this ongoing communication and just improving what we're doing but it's still a little bit point dependent and we need to become more strategic so, you know, review ways of working with student groups and becoming more strategic. Alexis has some ideas about this as well.

ALEXIS SMITH: Yes. Thanks, Amelia. Around Access, which is our database, our new database system that I mentioned earlier, basically, the goal is to try and keep as much of the information about the student in there as possible and keep as much of the referral, just anything that accessibility services does, we want to try and keep it within Access so that it's within the one spot. The good thing is is that we can provide people with different permissions. For example, I've given Amelia permissions to see the student's learning access plans but that's all. So, there's no breach of confidentiality around medical documentation but it means that if we ask the student, like, "Are you okay for Amelia to see your Learning Access Plan,” it means that rather than sending it via an email, which is, you know, can be compromised, Amelia can actually just log in to Access and view it that way. We can also generate automatic emails that we can sort of tailor for each student if we are doing a referral. So, that's what we're working on next, sort of looking at that referral process and how we can streamline that and keep that within Access.

AMELIA DOWE: Thanks so much. So, we have a very, very tiny case study because we don't have much time, just to sort of put it in context. This is a student with dyslexia, an international PhD student who was in touch with Carol. Carol, did you want to give a brief outline?

CAROL DEVEREAUX: Yes, sure. So, I had contact from this particular candidate at IMAS in their second year. I'm just going to take a tiny little snippet out of the information that she sent to me. We were hoping that we would have an actual case study with a real live student but, sorry, it didn't actually happen. Yesterday, I just had a quick look through the information that this particular student had said. “Had a meeting with my supervisors to discuss my progress. Prior to the meeting, I thought my problem was around scientific writing. However, in the meeting, they addressed I also have a problem with my English, being able to see a problem and issues with sentences and words. This was a new problem they shared with me.” So, she has gone all the way through her undergrad degree and it has then got to a certain type of writing and she is really feeling at a loss about, “What can I do.” So, it came through to disability services in terms of, “What can you do to help me? How can you help in terms of what my supervisors are expecting and what are some of the, you know, information channels I've got available to me that would then allow my supervisors to become aware of what it is about dyslexia that's making things so hard for me?” I felt that was a little bit out of, you know, my context of a DA and my professional knowledge. I felt that, through student learning, there may have been some supports available there, so contact with Amelia.

AMELIA DOWE: Yeah and we've worked quite a bit this year back and forth and, yeah, seems to be all going well. She's a bit of a hero for the Aussie legends as well, doing a PhD. I saw we've got under five minutes now. It would be really wonderful to hear from you because I know there's so much knowledge and experience in this room. We’re curious as to how you work with other services and if you've been working between student learning and disability, for example, like, I don't know. It would be really great to hear any thoughts you might have. Otherwise, we can continue rambling about what we have been doing for a few minutes.

CAROL DEVEREAUX: I'm just going to have a quick look and see if there's anything in there just at the moment. Just a couple of points about communication with our students, so important. Great.

AMELIA DOWE: It's been interesting because I've been trying to work out in general what sorts of relationships or working relationships there are between learning advisers like myself and disability teams. It's been a little bit hard to get information. I've heard a little bit about some types of referral processes, some ways of - like, a case management sort of model that sounds really like it could be very helpful. I know it's a really common thing to be happening in the UK and I just don't hear as much here, which is - yeah, there has got to be a lot of great work happening.

DEBBIE HINDLE: I'm sure there are some more questions that are coming in. Let's have a look. I must say, while you are looking, I think you're all 10s. I think you're all very talented.

CAROL DEVEREAUX: I think we come from a pretty amazing sector, though. There's so many great practitioners out there with wonderful ideas. And, sometimes, you know, you just get so busy, it's really hard to sort of remove yourself from your on the ground work to be able to share. If there's nothing that comes up at the moment, obviously, we would be really, really happy to get some feedback from anywhere else around from anyone who is doing something similar or has trialled something similar because, yeah, we are really keen to, I guess, formalise this a little bit more. You know, as Amelia was saying, it's pretty point dependent at the moment, so having some sort of process in place that can then be handed through to new people coming on to the team, we live in hope that that might happen, new people on to the team. But, yeah, that would be so greatly appreciated. So, yeah, please, if you've got any ideas - and if it's not now then maybe through Aust-Ed would be great. Thank you.

DEBBIE HINDLE: People might be a little bit like me, Carol, I'm a bit of a reflector so I will think about some things and then sort of engage.

ANNA PODOROVA: Sorry, Debbie. This is Anna Podorova speaking. It was making me too long to write my question, can I just ask it?

DEBBIE HINDLE: Please, that would be wonderful, thank you.

ANNA PODOROVA: I'm from the Faculty of Education at Monash University. We do use Access for our own needs for the literacy and numeracy team and the students who are preparing to sit or resit the LANTIT, the literacy and numeracy test for teachers. We talk to the disability unit but we don't have a system that we could use to track student engagement or progress or with the support we provide, so we mostly rely on students disclosing their condition or we almost prompt for it because, sometimes, we can see whether it's a test anxiety or a reading disability that may be impacting on their performance. We do try to avoid the deficiency discourse when we talk about students with disabilities but sometimes it's important to acknowledge that, as you say, as early as possible. Could you provide some advice on how would you do that if you were a learning skills adviser or an academic language adviser and you had a suspicion? How would you go about it?

AMELIA DOWE: So, I would be asking a few questions about how they had found reading and writing in general. Look, I'm not an expert either. I would just be sort of having some general chats about how reading and writing was at school. Sometimes, even just asking that question, people will talk, like, have a whole lot of experiences that they’ll bring up about writing. Sometimes, it will - oh, it's a really hard one. Sometimes, it's pretty clear, they will talk about family history of dyslexia or they’ve often been worried about it or concerned about it. We do have a screening thing here that the disability team can do if they suspect someone might have a learning disability and then they can be referred to the psychology clinic for assessment, which is pretty amazing. And I just sort of, in general, try to incorporate it into everything that we're doing and raise that awareness everywhere. So, if I'm doing a mainstream workshop about reading strategies, I will say, you know, "By the way, we have a screening thing here if you have dyslexia and you can see the disability advisers and we've got all these other things available." Like, I obviously can't diagnose anyone or anything, but if they're having certain types of trouble like accessing text, there's all that software that's available for everybody, like in the Microsoft tools and we've got a site licence for Read and Write. You can say, “We can try these things. If they help you, you can go and see the disability advisers.” Just try and as much as possible normalise it, like, one in 10 people are likely to have dyslexia in some shape or form.

CAROL DEVEREAUX: And I will just add in there, too, we are lucky, our Vice Chancellor has dyslexia and is very, very open about the fact that he does. He has come along to the LD Legends meetings. It's almost an aspirational thing, I think, at UTAS, look at our VC, you know? Here is a gentleman who is at the top of his field. He has dyslexia. He has battled through and he talks very openly about his battles but has actually, you know, in the end has succeeded extraordinarily well. So, I think as Amelia was saying, normalising some of this stuff, it's not a bad thing. You think a bit differently, it doesn't mean that, you know, you can't do these things, it's just you've got to approach things in a different way. So, then how do we look at those approaches? How do we look at those strategies that are actually going to work for you?

ANNA PODOROVA: Thank you. Are any of your resources available for - to the public or are most of them inside the systems?

AMELIA DOWE: At this stage, it's inside the system but I should do something for all, like the academic language and learning organisation.

ANNA PODOROVA: Yeah, I think you should, yes.

DEBBIE HINDLE: Something else to add to your list there, Amelia. That's a very good question, Anna, and I think that's where we need to wrap up. I'm getting the wind up because there's a great screening that is going to happen very soon. So, Alexis, Carol and Amelia, thank you very much. I think you have kind of raised our expectations of really what can be achieved when - all this expertise that you work individually but combining that on the same vision is just brilliant. And I think UTAS seems to be the place to go if you want to go and study, if you have a disability or medical condition. So, thank you very, very much for your presentation and being with us at Pathways today. Thank you, I appreciate it.