DEBBIE: Welcome to your screens. Greg O’Connor, I know Greg is there from Texthelp and I’m pretty sure Anita Raftery is also with us as well from TAFE, New South Wales. Together they're going to present successfully embracing the unknown, the TAFE New South Wales 2020 student support journey. So Greg and Anita, you have such a wealth of experience looking at your bios in the education sector. You’ve held many positions. One of the benefits for us is that through that experience and that exposure you have gained extensive knowledge on inclusive practices, inclusive technologies and implementation and also some really good innovative ideas. I'm going to hand it over to you Greg and Anita, so thank you.

ANITA: Thanks, Debbie.

GREG: Thanks, Debbie.

ANITA: Can you hear me okay? It’s Anita hear. Great.

DEBBIE: I can, Anita.

ANITA: Thank you. Just before you start, I want to apologise. I've got a bit of a croaky voice today and non-COVID croaky voice. So if I do cough or splutter, I might just mute myself, so apologies in advance if that happens. So as Debbie mentioned, here we are, Greg and Anita. So I’ll let Greg introduce himself.

GREG: Hi, everybody. Great to be back at another Pathways conference, albeit virtual. So I'm the education and technology lead at Texttalk and it’s great to be with you, Anita.

ANITA: Thanks, Greg. I'm a teacher consultant for students who have a disability at TAFE New South Wales and I coordinate support for students who disclose a disability in the north region.

GREG: Yeah. And so what Anita and I are going to have is we’re going to have a bit of a chat for the next 20 minutes or so. What we want to do as the title of this presentation kind of says, we want to, kind of - it's about being successful in this unknown environment we're finding ourselves in about students, the student support journey and, in particular, we want to dive into literacy. We know the importance of supporting the literacy needs of all students is kind of - not kind of, is essential in supporting their agency, access to their programs of study, course completion and ultimately employability. So here at texthelp we have our literacy tool read & write which is currently found, I think, in about 90% of further and higher education locations across Australia and New Zealand. At TAFE New South Wales, Anita, this has been deployed as a statewide licence for all students and staff. I’ve got a question for you. What initially prompted TAFE New South Wales to go down the path of procuring a state-wide licence for read & write software to support all your students?

ANITA: Thanks, Greg. That's a great question. For those of you who are familiar with TAFE New South Wales, you may know that several years ago we were actually 7 – actually not 7, 11 different RTOs, registered training organisations. Over the last few years there’s been a one TAFE modernisation program where we have moved from separate RTOs to one single RTO and merging different processes together to have a consistent way of operating and provide a consistent student experience across the whole state. Part of that process, of course, was trying to get some consistency with access to learning and literacy support software for our students, and across TAFE New South Wales we did an audit and our various 11 RTOs were using a variety of different software packages to support students who had literacy and learning support needs and read & write was one of the main software packages that was being used across RTOs, but it was in very different forms. Some RTOs had whole licences, some were lending USBs to students. So we had a software licence consolidation project that I was involved in and that was just quite a comprehensive project. One of the drivers as well is that as with other training services and RTOs, we've got a really diverse student population and we needed something that was going to be in line with our TAFE New South Wales goal of universal design for learning, so that students didn't have to disclose that they had a disability or a barrier to learning to be able to access this sort of literacy and learning support. That means our students who come from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can access the literacy software, students who may have had limited opportunities for education as a young person, and mature aged students who may not have studied for a long time, so need a bit of extra support to get back into the learning and study environment.

GREG: Actually that was an interesting point you made before, depending where students were and what they were doing, there was a whole range of tools they were having access to the support literacy ed tech tools, and I know i mny work that I do across the Asia-Pacific region it is one thing to identify that we need to look at those tools and make them accessible to all our students, it is another thing to actually roll them out. Often the initial barrier to providing literacy tools is the actual just getting someone to realise it needs to be deployed across whatever system you're operating in. So I've been thinking about TAFE NSW and I was wondering, how did you go - what did you do in the first place to actually get read & write procured in TAFE New South Wales? Then how did you get over the whole deployment issue because it's a big place where you work, Anita.

ANITA: Yeah. TAFE New South Wales is a huge organisation. We have enrolled around 4,000 students every year. We have around 11% of our students who disclose on enrolment that they have a disability and may have additional support needs. So we had a whole range and suite of business requirements that we needed to articulate really clearly to our legal and procurement team and that was a whole new challenge for us as well, but it was a really worthwhile exercise. So we had to really clearly articulate to members of TAFE New South Wales in different areas of the business that we needed to have something that would work across all software programs that our students use. So that means that students doing graphic design or students doing business studies, students enrolled in IT, that the software solution was going to be available across all of those platforms. Also available in PDF to read PDF text out loud and in accessible text. And critically we have a lot of students who engage with our TAFE New South Wales courses who may come from remote and regional areas. So it's very important that the software solution for literacy support not be 100% dependent at all times on having internet connection. We also have a lot of students who experience severe disadvantage and so they identify that at home they may not have an internet connection. So we had a range of business requirements that needed to be met and in summary the solution had to be available online, offline, across multiple operating systems, user friendly and relevant for all of our students and also transferrable to the workplace. I mean, the most important thing is that we want our students to be developing skills to support their learning and literacy that is then going to meet their needs in the workplace as well. For our trainees and apprentices to be able to use that solution in the workplace as well.

GREG: I was just going to jump in and ask. So you've got UDL on your slide there. I think it's so important to frame whatever we do within that paradigm of it's like – it’s a systems approach to ensuring how students access the content that they have to deal with, how they demonstrate understanding and how they engage with the learning content. Did you find that really important? Did you have to spend a lot of time explaining what UDL was or that had happened before this process started?

ANITA: Yeah. That's a really interesting comment, Greg. Because we were collaborating with staff from areas of the business in procurement and ICT and legal who maybe didn't have much of a breadth of experience in working with TAFE students who have disabilities and diverse learning needs, we had lots of conversations about what UDL means, universal design for learning, what it might mean to have a low-level of literacy, but be very able to understand the content and the concepts and how we needed to, as an RTO, provide students with alternative ways to express and demonstrate their knowledge. So there was a lot of conversations around those sort of topics, Greg.

GREG: Yeah. You rolled out read & write as an example university across the system. So every student and every staff at TAFE New South Wales has access to this tool. I guess, that was the easy part, kind of – well, I don’t know for you, was it an easy part just doing that bit but then actually getting it to the next stage of actually someone saying we’ll take this on board and then we’ll deploy it must have been - had its own challenges.

ANITA: Yep, it sure did. There was a lot of collaboration within the organisation and had a lot of benefits actually in upskilling and having really in depth conversations about what it means to be supporting a student with a disability at TAFE and about equality of access. So there was a lot of benefits across different areas of the business, I think, as a result of the project. One of the challenging things that we found too was the timeline because all this was happening at the end of 2019 and there was an aim to go live ready for the semester 1, 2020 start. So the ICT team did a fabulous job in deploying the software, so that meant that it was pushed out to every student build TAFE New South Wales computer on campuses. We had support materials so that those students who were studying via TAFE digital, that is, like, 100% online, were able to go through and install the software on their personal computers and the same resources available for all staff and our library teams, our disability support teams, and our student central. All of those staff who were front-facing staff, so there was some awareness there. We did a lot of work in that sort of space and there's still work to be done because, obviously, staff change and communication sometimes has some gaps. That's one of the things that we've learnt is that we need to have some sort of continuous communication in that area. We did go live at the beginning of semester 1 in 2020 which I think was a great achievement. As I said, it was a massive collaborative effort and including the roll out, so we've got a keyboard short-cut on all our TAFE computers so that read and write software is really easy for students to visually locate. The icon is deployed automatically to the browsers, so edge and chrome. So again it is very easy for students to see when they're here on campus, and the materials to support students to install the software on their own personal computers is available as well.

GREG: For me, my role in that was helping to upskill everybody across TAFE about why this kind of technology was needed and the fact that it wasn't for discrete students but actually for every student across TAFE to use. And then of course, 2020. What happened in 2020? Let me think, I know. Lots of things have happened in 2020. This is all - there has so many challenges across all education systems, but, of course, COVID-19 happened then. So for further and higher education institutions that I work with, I just observed the need to be really agile and responsive to the changing nature of the whole post-school environment. That is what you do anyway, but this kind of compounded that whole thing and then you then guys decided you wanted to roll out a whole new cloud-based ed tech system, system wide. So I would imagine there were a few issues with dealing with change when deploying read & write and I would imagine maybe unforeseen challenges that you didn’t know, like, COVID-19.

ANITA: Yes. Who would have guessed that COVID was going to happen. So we had a great plan to have face-to-face staff development and online training activities and a whole range of different awareness-raising activities on campus and online. Once COVID hit we changed to connected delivery in the end of March and all of term 2. So that meant that we actually had to change the way that we were delivering and supporting students at TAFE and one of the fortunate things is that we already had read & write deployed and we already had it available for students to install on their own personal computers. One of the other big changes that happened with COVID-19 was that there was a help desk set up for students. So we were able to upskill the IT help desk. Our library services teams started online chat facilities. Again, they were able to support students in that way. Where we had support for students in classes that changed to virtual connected delivery support. Support staff would phone, text and private message students to keep them connected with the virtual delivery of the classroom. Like all organisations, I’m sure we’ve got a shared experience where some students actually thrived in that online environment where they didn't need to leave their comfortable safe homes and come on campus, but many students of our students really struggled with the isolation. It was really important that we had that connection with the students via Teams and SMS and also we were able to then provide that additional support in using read & write because there was a significant increase in the amount of text-based materials that a lot of students needed to engage with. It was just an amazing coincidence of time that we had read & write deployed statewide prior to COVID-19 hitting but also so fortunate. As I said, some of the other changes were we had an IT student support hotline that was commenced. There was upskilling of staff there. Again, all of our online and face-to-face webinars and training had to be put on hold because we had a huge impact on delivery and teaching staff due to COVID-19 and them having to change their resources and delivery strategies to connected delivery rather than face-to-face on campus for the remainder of semester 1. So I've got a little table showing on the slide. That just shows a little bit of the read & write software usage over time, and this table only shows when students and staff are using read & write and they're also connected to the internet. So it doesn't include the data for students who are using an offline desktop installation or Mac, but you can see that from December 2019 where the software was installed just on some old RTOs to 2020, there's a significant increase in the uptake and also a significant increase in the uptake of the Google Chrome extension. We're trying to get a little bit more insight into that sort of uptake, but from anecdotal evidence we think that is due to students obviously being on a connected delivery online environment and then being able to access the read & write tool bar to support accessing some of the text-based content and materials. There is a spiky graph here showing the usage in Google Chrome and Windows. I’m sorry it might be a little bit small but you can actually see with the Chrome version there’s a significant increase in usage that starts in March as well, which I think is, sort of – has a correlation to the beginning of connected delivery.

GREG: It definitely is. That spike is as a result of COVID and remote learning where students needed to have access to their tools whenever and wherever they were. It kind of really brings that point home, doesn’t it? You know, you're not tethered to a machine. You just need to have your access wherever you are and whatever device that you're using. So that’s super interesting.

ANITA: Yep.

GREG: What about the feedback from students, Anita?

ANITA: Yeah. We have had some really positive feedback from students. They have just valued that they didn't need an internet connection at home for all of those reasons that we discussed before. Some of the feedback was that they would like the speech to text to be better, to be more accurate. A lot of students really would like to use that more. Quite a few of our students also said that they would like the opportunity to have more training and support to use the software. That's been difficult to provide that level of support this year due to COVID, but it's something that we are definitely taking on board and investigating into the future, how that we can provide that. So I know we have some little short how to videos and so forth but we need to, I guess, be a bit more agile in working out other ways that we can provide that information to students when they need it. We do offer a lot of short courses at TAFE as well obviously. So we need to be able to jump on board and demonstrate to students the value of using read & write to support their learning and success in the first few days of them starting a course, to really make sure that they're engaged. Just looking towards the future as well, Greg, I guess, is just recapping the multi platform, the online and the offline capacity of read & write has just been critical in this COVID 19 year. The feedback is from staff and students, we need more of those sort of need it now, need that information sort of support resources. We were talking about maybe trialling more ways that we can interact with students early on and that might be via some connected delivery group sessions as well to meet the needs of students who study via TAFE digital or online and also on campus based. The IT student phone support is continuing next year as well, which is a fabulous resource. I think they've been getting something like one hundred calls a day from students, obviously not all about read & write software, but often about other issues around accessing maybe their Moodle or online resources or logging into student portals, so that has been a really successful, I guess, innovation that came about due to COVID-19. We want to investigate some more options to get some more, I guess, consistent student feedback, get some better data there as well.

GREG: Thanks, Anita. My take in all that, as we finish up is, that education and technology really is – it really amplifies, not only it teaches pedagogy but system wide values. When you’ve got the journey you’ve been on to actually say, we need tech that is going to meet all those UDL principles and actually ensure that all our students are successful, I think it is awesome. Looking forward to staying with you on this journey post-COVID 19 and into 2021.

ANITA: Yeah. We have lots more work to do and hopefully just continue on that path of universal design and engaging all of our students.

DEBBIE: Anita, I don’t need to do a bit of a wrap up because Greg has done that so succinctly for me, so thank you. But there is a few questions that have come in. So, Amy, I didn’t know whether you wanted to jump on and do some questions. I will do one while you're finding one. What is the volume licence of red and white of TAFE New South Wales? Is there a volume and is there a cost involved for students to install it on their personal computers?

ANITA: Thanks, Debbie, that’s a really good question. So TAFE New South Wales has purchased the annual subscription licence and so that includes deployment across all operating systems and platforms. So that's Mac, Windows, Chrome, Edge and so forth. It also entitles students and staff to install the software on their personal devices, while they are either a TAFE New South Wales student or TAFE New South Wales staff member. It is the TAFE New South Wales email address that authenticates the personal installation process.

GREG: And it’s unlimited so it’s not a – it’s just an unlimited licence for how many students TAFE NSW has.

DEBBIE: We have another one. How long was TAFE New South Wales teaching online? Was it just semester 1 this year?

ANITA: We transitioned to connected delivery in the second last week of term 1, so that was a couple of weeks before Easter. I haven't got my calendar, so I can't think of the dates. Then connected delivery continued through term 2 and some face-to-face delivery, started transitioning back in semester 2. So term 3.

DEBBIE: No, that’s brilliant. Anita and Greg, thank you very much for your time today and sharing that insight into the roll-out of that in TAFE New South Wales. Being an ex-student of TAFE NSW makes me very proud of the great achievements that you have done there. You certainly gave yourself a challenge, Anita, but I think you have excelled. One of the things that really, really jumps out at me and I get very excited is that I really, really like this sector and it's just when everyone comes on board with the same vision, it is amazing what we can do. Your IT department to roll the technology out in people's houses and in campuses around the state, so many campuses, so many students have gained value just from one software. It is amazing that one software can make a massive difference to everybody and make that learning experience so positive that they will come back and continue learning. So it’s just a brilliant, brilliant outcome. We are very happy and very fortunate to have you in our sector. I like how they also - one of the others things is you do a course to get a job, so having this behind you and feeling confident that you have done the work and you have achieved, it is amazing how that then translates into employment. Anita and Greg, thank you. Greg, we haven't seen the end of you. I know that you are in our sponsor exhibition space with Texthelp, so please additional questions to Greg, you can visit there. So thank you very much for your time today and continue enjoying Pathways.

GREG: Thank you, Debbie.

ANITA: Thanks, Deb. Bye.