LA TROBE
UNIVERSITY

ACADEMIC BOARD

Minutes of the five hundred and seventh meeting of the Academic Board held in
the Chamber, John Scott Meeting House, La Trobe University, Melbourne Campus
on Wednesday 10 October 2018 at 9.30am.

Present:	Professor Christine Bigby (Chair), Dr Sarah Anderson, Dr Julie Andrews, Ms Kate Ashman (*via videoconference*), Dr Joanna Barbousas, Professor Nick Bisley, Professor Irene Blackberry (*via video conference*), Professor Lynn Bosetti, Dr Narelle Brack, Dr Kate Bridgman, Professor Philip Broadbridge, Dr Geoff Dickson, Dr Elly Djouma, Dr Jason Dutton, Professor Simon Evans, Professor Christopher Fisher, Dr Tracy Fortune, Professor Margarita Frederico, Ms Nellie Green, Dr Peter Green, Professor Jane Hamilton, Mr Brad Hodge *(via video conference*), Professor Katie Holmes, Professor Russell Hoye, Professor Rachel Huxley, Professor Teresa Iacono (*via video conference),* Mr Michael Ioreche, Professor Catherine Itsiopoulos, Mr Greg Jamieson, Professor Amanda Kenny, Professor Stephen Kent, Mr Mohsin Khawaja, Ms Julie Kiroluch, Ms Spomenka Krizmanic, Professor Kerri-Lee Krause, Dr Amy Larsen, Professor Nicki Lee, Ms Alexandra Lloyd Leighton, Professor Chris Mackie, Dr Kate Mai, Dr Dona Martin (*via video conference*), Professor Susan Martin, Dr Clare McCausland, Dr Silvia McCormack, Dr Robyn Murphy, Ms Susan Nalder (*via video conference)*, Dr Deborah Neal, Professor Mary Anne Noone, Professor Jennifer Oates, Professor Chris Pakes, Ms Jennifer Peasley, Professor Simon Pervan, Professor Joanna Poyago-Theotoky, Dr Luke Prendergast, Professor Wenny Rahayu, Dr Tania Romano, Professor Miranda Rose, Professor Mahsood Shah, Professor Brian Smith, Dr Evelien Spelten, Mr Robert Stevenson, Dr Keir Strickland, Dr Rwth Stuckey, Professor Vijaya Sundararajan, Professor Gillian Sullivan Mort, Dr Colleen Thomas, Dr Guinever Threlkeld, Dr Suzane Vassallo, Professor James Walker, Dr Mary Whiteside, Professor Rob Wilson, Mr David Wishart, Professor Lawrie Zion.
Secretariat:	Ms Susan Rees-Osborne, Senior Executive Officer, Governance and Policy Services.
In Attendance:	Dr MaryAnne Aitken, Mr Matt Brett, Ms Gabrielle Bright, Mr Peter Czech, Dr Richard Frampton, Ms Robyn Harris, Ms Shannon Kerrigan, Ms Nicole Lee, Mr Leon Morris.
Welcome to Country	Dr Julie Andrews delivered an 'Acknowledgement of Country' in which she acknowledged the Wurundjeri as the traditional owners of the land upon which the Melbourne Campus is located and paid her respects to elders past and present. Dr Andrews also acknowledged the traditional owners of the lands upon which the various regional campuses are located and paid respect to the elders past and present of those lands.

DISCUSSION PANEL – Academic Policies and Practices on Disability – Perspectives from Staff and Students

Disability at La Trobe (AB18/87)
Disability Action Plan (AB18/87b)

Panel members:
- Professor Chris Bigby (Chair Academic Board, and Director, Living with Disability Research Centre)
- Mr Matt Brett, Senior Manager Higher Education Policy
- Ms Nicole Lee, La Trobe University student
- La Trobe University undergraduate student [who preferred to be de-identified]
- La Trobe University academic staff member [who preferred to be de-identified]

[Secretariat note: a full edited transcript of the discussion is attached to these minutes]

Professor Chris Bigby introduced the discussion, noting that there is scant data available regarding staff and students with disabilities, however the little data there is indicates that students experience a lower than average level of student satisfaction and lower rates of employment following their graduation than other students. Professor Bigby reported that while La Trobe University has a good track record in disability related research, disability is all but invisible in the University's policies and processes. The onus is on students and staff themselves to seek support and the University then responds with various levels of support. A better approach would be systemic change to an all-inclusive environment that supports all staff and students, both disabled and able-bodied. Professor Bigby noted the Disability Action Plan 2018-2020 marks the beginning of the discussion around systemic change.

Mr Matt Brett delivered a presentation outlining the statistics of disabled people participating in higher education, noting that as 10% of staff and 9% of students are estimated to be disabled, they are not a niche part of the University's population but are core business. In terms of student success, disappointingly, La Trobe University has moved from a position of disabled students experiencing similar rates of success as other students in 2009 (significantly ahead of the sector rate), to a position in 2016 significantly below other students and commensurate with the sector. Retention rates follow a similar pattern. These statistics have direct relevance to the University's strategic plan, which prioritises the student experience as a key metric. The Higher Education Standards Panel recently released a report entitled 'Improving retention, completion and success in Higher Education' which made the recommendation that every institution should have an institution-wide mental health strategy and implementation plan. Mr Brett noted that the Disability Action Plan is a start, but the University needs to consult and engage with disabled staff and students themselves, in the first instance.

An invited academic staff member delivered a brief presentation, outlining her experiences as a staff member with a vision impairment trying to navigate various University systems including MyHR, Turnitin, PebblePad and the LMS, with assistive technology. She noted the frustrations commonly experienced and the work-arounds she has to employ to fulfill her work responsibilities. The staff member noted that going beyond compliance with accessible standards and engaging in an ongoing dialogue with student and staff with disability, will enable the university to better address disability-related issues and harness the capability of its workforce. Making disability a priority means prioritising productivity, efficiency and wellbeing.

Ms Nicole Lee reported that when she commenced studying in 2017, assuming the campus environment would be fully accessible to all, she found that many lecture and tutorial venues were inaccessible, with stairs, broken lifts and heavy doors. Ms Lee commented on the disempowering, tiring effect of continually facing these barriers. She expressed hope that the University changes to an all inclusive model that provides all students with equal access, and that engagement with disabled students needs to be at the core of this process.

An undergraduate student from Bendigo spoke of the assistance and support she has received from the Equity & Diversity unit, which has enabled her to access a Learning Access Plan. She commented that many of the support systems available such as online lectures, the ability to study part time, and study skills training, assist all students including those with disability. The student also noted that while she receives academic assistance, there is not sufficient social support for students with anxiety or autism and

encouraged the University to implement support groups or buddy systems and integration aids for students in need.

Discussion:
During discussion, the following points were noted:
- Disclosure is a major issue. To access services, staff and students must disclose their disability and some people are reluctant to identify as disabled, for various reasons;
- The Equity & Diversity unit is for students only and does not provide support to staff;
- The importance of language – sensitivity and diplomacy. A simple solution is to ask Are you okay, and what do you need?
- Learning Access Plans (LAPs) are not tailored to accommodate the needs of postgraduate research students;
- There's a need for institutional support and training for staff members who want to learn how to best support their colleagues and students;
- It is proposed to establish a Disability Committee as a sub committee of Education Committee. Its functions would include monitoring the actions from the Disability Action Plan, providing a forum for discussions around disability and an accessible environment, and its membership would include staff and students.

The Chair thanked all panel members and members of the Board for their participation.

Academic Board **noted** the:
- background information and statistics on disability
- the work in progress led by the HR Director of Diversity Inclusion and Culture to consult with staff and students in order to refine and prioritise the implementation of the Disability Action Plan, and the suggestion that this work include a review of academic governance and policies relating to disability;
- proposal to establish a Disability Committee as a sub committee of the Education Committee.

PART A – PROCEDURAL MATTERS

		ACTION
(i)	**Apologies & Membership** Apologies were received from John Dewar, Keith Nugent, Paula Baron, Matthias Ernst, Robert Pike, Ishaq Bhatti, Warwick Frost, Kevin Brianton, Anne Wallace, Josephine Barbaro, Patrick Keyzer, Donna Burnett, Nicole Melitsis, Jeremy Seward, Jessica Vanderlelie, Carol McKinstry, Matthew Nicholson, Prem Kurup, Nick Bond, Andrea Young, Helen Irving, Pamela Snow, Amalia Di Iorio, Fiona Kelly, Richard Speed, Nicole El-Haber, Birgit Loch, Pauleen Bennett, Grant Drummond, Gwenda Tavan, Jennifer Jones, Sandra Leggatt.	
(ii)	**Approval of Agenda** The Board **resolved** to **approve** the Agenda, as circulated.	
(iii)	**Outstanding Matters** The Board received and **noted** the Outstanding Matters report AB18/88.	
(iv)	**Report of the Chair** The Chair provided a brief verbal update on the following items:	

(a) The call for nominations for the 2019 student members of the Board was made on Monday 8 October. The nomination period closes on 22 October 2018.

(b) The proposed revised Academic Promotions policy is currently on the policy website Bulletin Board, available for view and feedback. The deadline for submissions of feedback is 19 October. The policy will be submitted to the Academic Board for approval at its November meeting.

(v) **Report of the Vice-Chancellor**

The Board received and **noted** circulated paper AB18/89, the Report of the Vice-Chancellor, which can be located at the following link:

https://unite.latrobe.edu.au/sites/sc/sgc/abc/abmeeting2018/Document%20Library2/7/AB18-89%20VC's%20report%20October%202018.pdf

The Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) spoke to the report on behalf of the Vice-Chancellor and provided a brief update on the following additional items:

- Congratulations to all those staff who have received sector awards recently;
- The University's inaugural and highly successful postgraduate expo was held on 9 October – over 1100 people registered to attend the event. Thanks to all staff who contributed to the success of the day;
- The Vice-Chancellor has commissioned a review of all policies with regard to freedom of speech on university campuses;
- All staff are invited to visit the policy website bulletin board to view and provide feedback on the draft amendments to the academic promotions policy prior to its submission to the Academic Board in November. Link to bulletin board: https://policies.latrobe.edu.au/bulletin

VC
DVCA
ED, P&G

A member of the Board queried the note in the Vice-Chancellor's Report regarding the Good Universities Guide and the University's decline in ranking of student to teacher ratio. As noted in the report, this was primarily due to a data coding issue that has since been rectified. The Academic Board invited the Executive Director Planning & Governance to circulate the updated data for discussion at the November meeting.

PART B – MATTERS FOR APPROVAL

507.1 Confirmation of Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 September 2018 [AB18/85(M)] were **confirmed** as a true and accurate record.

507.2 Items for Approval

507.1 Award of Degrees and Diplomas

Academic Board received circulated report AB18/90 and **resolved** to **approve** the award of degrees and diplomas and higher degrees, as detailed therein.

AEGTO
GRS

507.3	**Standing Committees of Academic Board**

507.3.1 Report of Admissions Committee: 6 September 2018

The Board received report AB18/91 and noted that the Admissions Committee had considered the following items at a meeting held on 6 September 2018:

(a) Articulation Tables

(b) English Language Entry Requirement Procedure Schedule 1 and 2

(c) Update on Aspire Early Admission Program (2018)

EO(CC)
PVC(SS)
Chr (AC)

The Board discussed the issue of the support available with regard to English language requirements and it was agreed to invite the Pro Vice-Chancellor (Student Success) to provide a report to the Board on this matter.

It was also agreed to schedule a discussion at the next meeting on the role of the Admissions Committee and invite the Chair, Admissions Committee to provide a discussion paper.

The Academic Board **resolved** to **approve**:

- the revised English Language Entry Requirements Procedure: Schedule 1 and 2;
- the 2019 Admissions Committee Business Schedule

507.3.2 Report of Coursework Committee: 20 September 2018

The Board received report AB18/92 and AB18/92b and noted that the Coursework Committee had considered the following items at a meeting held on 20 September 2018:

a) Course submissions from the College of Science, Health and Engineering

b) Course submissions from the College of Arts, Social Sciences and Commerce

EO(CC)

Academic Board **resolved** to **approve** the following course proposals:

- **New Courses** (as per attachment A to paper AB18/92)

EO(CC)
GenMgr
DD SAdmin
APVC(CW)

College of Arts Social Sciences and Commerce

➤ Master of Digital Marketing Communications (LMDC), Graduate Diploma in Digital Marketing Communications (LGDC), Graduate Certificate in Digital Marketing Communications (LCDC)

➤ Bachelor of Laws/Bachelor of Politics, Philosophy and Economics (LWPPE)

➤ Exit Only Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education

➤ Exit Only Diploma in Early Childhood Education

College of Science Health and Engineering

➤ Bachelor of Community Services (HBCSVB, HBCSVS, HBCSVM, HBCSVW, HBCSVD, HBCSV)

- **Course Revisions** (as per attachment B to paper AB18/92)

College of Arts Social Sciences and Commerce

  ➢ Bachelor of Early Childhood Education (EBEL)
  ➢ Bachelor of Politics, Philosophy and Economics (LBPPE)
  ➢ Bachelor of Media and Communication (ABMC), Bachelor of Laws/Bachelor of Media and Communication (LWLMC)

College of Science Health and Engineering
  ➢ Bachelor of Applied Science and Master of Dietetic Practice (HZNDP), Master of Dietetic Practice (HMDP)
  ➢ Master of Sports Analytics (HMSA)
  ➢ Bachelor of Pharmacy (Honours) (SHPB)
  ➢ Master of Mental Health (HMMH), Graduate Diploma in Mental Health (HGMH), Graduate Certificate in Mental Health (HCMH)
  ➢ Master of Cybersecurity (Computer Science) (SMCYC), Master of Cybersecurity (Law) (SMCYL), Master of Cybersecurity (Business Operations) (SMCYB), Graduate Diploma in Cybersecurity (SGCY), Graduate Certificate in Cybersecurity (SCCY)

- **Course Closures** (as per attachment C to paper AB18/92)

College of Arts Social Sciences and Commerce
  ➢ Bachelor of Social Sciences (ABSS)

Report of Coursework Committee Out of Session October 2018
Course Revision *(as per paper AB18/92b)*

College of Science, Health and Engineering
• Master of Data Science (SMDS)

507.3.2 **Report of Education Committee: 19 September 2018**

The Board received report AB18/93 and noted that the Education Committee had considered the following items at a meeting held on 19 September 2018:
(a) Teaching Quality Taskforce – interim report June 2018
(b) La Trobe University and Navitas Academic Partnership
(c) Request for a waiver of Credit Points and Course Structure Policy for two students undertaking the Physical Education specialization within the Bachelor of Education (Secondary) Melbourne (EBEDS), Bendigo (EBEDSB)
(d) Update on the Conduct and Behaviours Working Group
(e) Report of the University Appeals Committee Working Group
(f) 2017 Student Experience Survey – high level summary
(g) 2019 Education Committee meeting dates

Academic Board **noted** the report of the Education Committee.

EO(EC)

PART C – MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

507.4   Matters for Information

507.4.1   Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Portfolio Report

Professor Kerri-Lee Krause spoke to the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) operational report AB18/94, advising that priorities over the past year have included:

- Improving the quality of learning and teaching
- Improving the quality of student transition, learning support and employability
- Addressing La Trobe social justice and equity values and targets
- Achieving international load targets in partnership with key stakeholders.

The Academic Board **noted** the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic) Portfolio Operational report.

507.5   Next Meeting

9.30am
Wednesday 14 November 2018
Chamber
John Scott Meeting House
Melbourne Campus

The meeting closed at 11.00am.

Chair: _____

Date: _____

Panel Discussion – Academic Policies and Practices on Disability – Perspectives from Students and Staff.

Panel members
Matt Brett - senior manager higher education policy
Academic staff member [de-identified]
Nicole Lee – student based in Bundoora
Student based in Bendigo [de-identified]

Christine Bigby Students and staff with disabilities are key groups within the University whose numbers are steadily growing but we have little good data about them. The data that we have about students with disabilities is not promising in terms of experience, retention or employability. Currently about 7% of students have a disability.

As the National Disability Insurance Scheme is implemented, attention to the inclusion of students and staff with disabilities in universities is likely to increase. Economic participation of people with disability is one of the key aims of this policy, which in turn requires greater access to higher education and attention to employment post-graduation.

La Trobe University has a significant research track record in disability, such as disability support services, inclusion of people with intellectual disabilities or acquired brain injury, and a wide range of issues associated with mental illness and autism. However, disability is fairly invisible in academic policy terms and the profile of university. It seems to be everyone and no one's business. This was illustrated by the neglect of the previous Disability Action Plan and the limited progress on implementation action of the new plan.

The University has tended to rely on students with disabilities identifying themselves and then provision of reasonable adjustments in terms of individual support to those students – things like note-takers and extra time at exams – a fairly narrow range of options. And there's been a significant growth, over time, in the demand on those disability support services.

While these are important, obviously, for some students, they can also be very difficult , particularly for students who have more invisible disabilities, for whom there are issues of stigma and discrimination often associated with disclosure. Having to identify yourself as somebody with a disability, in order to get the support that you need, can be very disadvantaging for students and for staff. Negotiating adjustments in situations of real power differential can be really problematic.

Our group did some research, several years ago, with students and staff at La Trobe and a TAFE college, which suggested that navigating the implementation of things like learning access plans was fraught with difficulties for many students. It worked well for some students but for others, there were real issues. You don't only have to negotiate with the disability support service and one staff member. You have to negotiate with every single staff member that you come across, for every single subject, and that is far from ideal.

There is a parallel process that could also happen, which we have not pursued as strongly as providing individual services, and involves taking a much broader, systemic approach to creating a learning and a work environment that is inclusive of everybody. And, that requires thinking about the principles of universal design, which is easiest in relation to thinking about physical access – an approach that supports not only students with disabilities, but everybody else, as well which means there is no need for special and different provisions. If we had a campus where all rooms were accessible – if we had a transport system that was accessible – then, you some people wouldn't need to identify as having a disability.

In educational terms universal design means taking account of students and their diverse backgrounds and their diverse styles of learning, in the way in which we develop the curriculum, the way we develop teaching materials, and in our instructional methods. In terms of retention, it means things such as

flexibility of assessment tasks, submission dates, early warning triggers, and so on. Changing structures and processes can help to make education inclusive for everybody, rather than having to do it on a one by one basis.

La Trobe, at the moment, still has some fundamental issues around universal design that are missing. Not all rooms in this campus, or in the other campuses, are accessible. There is no easy reference point for staff or students to know which ones are accessible. The web, as we will hear some more about, still remains largely inaccessible for some staff and students, as does the LMS system and a significant amount of teaching material. So, this failure, obviously, creates obstacles for students and staff, which, as we will hear, become incredibly exhausting and demanding for them.

So, in the long term, thinking about systemic change may be a much more effective approach, rather than individual adjustments, which are becoming more and more difficult and costly. But, actually, we don't know very much at all, in this university, about the experience of staff and students. We have heard almost nothing from them over the last few years, and, there is very little research about what individual adjustments and what broader adjustments actually are most effective.

The aim of today's panel is to begin to raise the profile of issues around access and inclusion, to begin a process of consultation. There is a disability action plan and consultation around that is about to start and is being led by the HR Director of Diversity, Inclusion and Culture, Zemeel Saba. So today is a beginning of the process. We want to try and identify some student and staff experiences, and also hear from members of Academic Board about their experiences, and begin a discussion, too, around what sort of governance there should there be around academic policies about inclusion and access.

At the moment, the disability policies and the disability action plan sit within HR and none of the Academic Board subcommittees have disability access as part of their mandate. I think it's worth trying to think about – how can we start to have some more oversight and monitoring of the academic side of disability policies? So, on that note, I'm going to hand over to Matt Brett, who is going to speak first. His paper was circulated with the Board papers and he is going to highlight some its key points. Note too that the disability action plan was also in your papers.

Matt Brett Thanks. Christine has indicated that it's my last week at La Trobe and, to me, it's quite humbling and quite an honour that the last meeting board that I will attend will have a discussion about disability - this is an issue that I'm really, really passionate about. And, if I've got one regret about my time at La Trobe – and, I've had a great time here and I wish you all the very, very best – it's that I have had not turned my attention, internally, around disability policy. I have left that to other parts of the university while I've been focused on the external higher education policy scene, which has been great. But, again, it's a bit of a regret that I've not been able to explore my passion, internally, as strongly as I might have desired.

So, today, in some ways, I'm keen to reflect on where I think things are at, and where we could be focusing our attention. Central, again, to the approach that I have encouraged we take today is to minimise how much time I would take, maybe throw out a couple of stats, but to really provide an opportunity to give the stage to students and staff with disability. 'Nothing about us without us' is a mantra in disability circles, and that's embodied in the approach that we are taking today. So, I just want to say thanks to the panelists today for coming aboard and sharing your stories. I think it's much more powerful to hear from you than me – to hear any boring stats that I might be throwing around.

In terms of the key points that we are making, it's really important to recognise that disability is not some niche issue on the side within university operations. It's about 10% - one in ten of staff and students have a disability of some kind or another. This is getting close to core business. So, what I think has happened at La Trobe is that we have not recognised just how prominent it is, as part of our community, and today is an opportunity to try and put that back on the agenda with a little bit more prominence.

I will turn to staff with disability and just reaffirm the point. We don't really know what is going on for staff at La Trobe with disability. What we can do is look at the ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers, and that highlights around about 10% or close to 11% of staff employed in tertiary education in one institution or another. It doesn't give you the opportunity to really delve down into what that looks like at an individual and institutional level. But, across the sector and across Australian society, that is the estimate 11%. One in ten. And that's not too different from the rest of the economy. So, we are not better. We are not worse. We are around about the same.

We are also around about the same when it comes to self-reported discrimination. So, around about 8% of staff with a disability, employed in the tertiary sector, are articulating their experience of some sort of discrimination. So, we could expect that that is part and parcel of what we have got here at La Trobe as well, and we may hear more from a staff member, a bit later, around what an individual experience is like in that space.

We do have policies. We do have plans. We do have systems in place to be able to support staff with disabilities. And, I'm putting this screen grab up from the intranet – not to point the finger and not to disparage anyone involved. We have here a link to, or reference to, a policy 'disabilities, mental health, and/or ongoing medical conditions', the policy that is referenced was superseded a few years ago. So, it's a symbolic reference that indicates we haven't necessarily had it in the front and centre of our minds, around the kinds of things that we should be doing. We are putting a reference to outdated policies, rather than keeping this at the forefront of what we're doing.

Turning to students very quickly, at a national level, we see, from data collection, that there are about 60,000 students that disclose disability at enrolment. And, those numbers have grown by a staggering 78% over the period of 2009 to 2015. I've used that reference point because it immediately aligns with the survey period for the ABS Survey of Disability, Aging and Carers. So, you will often see people point to that statistic – that the numbers have grown enormously. But, in some ways, disability, through a more focused survey of disability differences, sees the numbers really growing along with the system as a whole. So, there's a bit of nuance to the story. What we are seeing is increasing disclosure. And, there's probably a shadow group of students that are still there, that have not disclosed yet, perhaps for a whole range of reasons relating to our policies and our disclosure practices. Nonetheless, disclosures are rising. The number of students that are seeking support are rising enormously, as well. It's a big part of our university community and something that we need to think about quite carefully.

If we turn to stats at La Trobe, we can make the distinction between students that are disclosing at enrollment the likelihood of needing some kind of support - those that are accessing services through equity and diversity services, and those that do both – that both disclose and seek services. We see there that 1500 that just disclose and 1000 that do both, and about 1000 that have not disclosed, that are not captured in our standard statistics – that are seeking services, as well. So, that adds up to around 3500 students in 2017 – around about 9% of the student population. So, again, around one in ten students are disclosing disability at some point. And, we can ask, are we doing enough to support those? Are we making it a prominent feature of our business with a similar focus to other communities?

What we do see from the formal statistics in higher education is that our success rates are falling quite significantly. We came close to parity which I think is something that we could have taken some pride in, back in 2009, for the extent to which success rates were equivalent between students with and without disability. That is the kind of thing we should be aiming for. We have seen that gap increase quite significantly and we are now close to the sector, as a whole. So, it is not as if we were terrible, by sector standards, but it's not something we should be necessarily taking great pride in – that that gap has opened up in the way that it has. And, that is also applied for retention, as well. So, success and retention are correlated, as you all know. And, again, that gap between parity and close to parity now is just below the sector average, should be something of concern, I think, to Academic Board and the University.

Satisfaction is also marginally lower for students disclosing disability through the student experience survey. And, as we all know, our student experience survey is the key measure for the university, in terms of our strategic plan. So, the fact that disability is a little bit lower there is of concern. I haven't put up every teaching scale there, but there are some scales within the student experience survey which are much, much lower. And this, again, warrants close attention in terms of what we are doing as a university.

The more interesting statistic, I think, in the student experience survey, is the question around whether students have considered leaving the university. And, for students with a disability, there is a marked increase in those that are thinking about leaving the university. Close to 29%, as opposed to 21%. So, our retention data are directly affected by numbers of students that are withdrawing from the university, in that sense.

There are some emerging challenges, as well, in the higher education landscape. Kerri-Lee sits on the Higher Education Standards Panel and would be very familiar with this report. You can, in part, thank her for endorsing or putting forward a recommendation that every university have an institution-wide mental health strategy and implementation plan. We don't, at La Trobe, have that, as yet, but that's something that we are working towards, I think. The government has endorsed that recommendation and there are efforts underway, at the moment, between the universities to formalize a way of being able to take a standardized approach to that. Mental health is different to disability. Mental illness falls in this overlapping concept. If we think about the total number of students with disability and the total number of students with mental health issues, we are thinking there is a very sizeable proportion of our student population for which systems, processes, policies really need to actively considered – how do we best support them to thrive and succeed in the university context?

Another emerging challenge, in some ways, is making best use of the data that we have. Some colleagues in PIPU recently did some analysis of those students who indicated that they were considering leaving the university and, surprise, surprise, those who said that they were thinking about leaving went on to not enroll in the following year at a much higher rate than those that did not indicate that they were thinking about leaving. The numbers end up being the same, but it is a data point that we can use, to say that there's a cohort that are saying that they are thinking of leaving that we can focus some specific attention on. And, the top reason for why they are considering leaving is health. It's disability. It's mental health. It's mental illness. These are the issues that – we could be thinking about how we address this cohort in a better way than we are currently, to boost success, to boost retention, to boost the quality of the experience.

Again, this isn't irrelevant to university strategy – our key metric score, student experience, graduate employability and staff satisfaction. And, I've not spoken at length about employment statistics, but if we have got problems in successful retention, I would say we have got a major catastrophe when it comes to graduate employment for students with disabilities. They are very sobering statistics if you have taken a look at those. We need to be thinking very carefully in this sector around – how do we make sure that these rising numbers of students disclosing disability are having a successful transition into the labour market?

The University has disability actions plans. So, we have a plan to do things in response. And, questions – it's over to the Board, I suppose, to really consider how important it is to address these issues. Really, I think a starting point, and the most important part of planning from this point, is hearing from staff and students about their experience, and that's what we've got here today.

Academic Staff member. I'm a lecturer at La Trobe and a researcher. I'm also a person with a visual impairment. As part of my responsibility in teaching, research and administration, I navigate several online systems, such as LMS, Pebble Pad, My HR, Turnitin, and so on. In order to do so, I rely heavily on assistive technology. I use a screen reader to help me read and navigate the online environment, and dictation software to help me with writing, which I have to do quite a lot, because I need to publish!

Using assistive technology entails a very different experience in the online environment. To give you just a little taste of how it feels, I would like to share with you 30 seconds of my life, demonstrating reading of an LMS page using the screen reader. Just to give you a quick show, screen reader reads from top to bottom and from right to left. [Gave a demonstration of browsing through an LMS page using a screen reader illustrating some of the challenges in accessing content and information on the website, caused by its failure to comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). For example, difficulties navigating the LMS is caused by the inability to access the side menu bar, inaccessible embedded links, images and graphics that have no text alternatives].

 I think it is really clear to see how time-consuming and tedious it can be, but, as long as everything on a web page is open content and complies with the disability standards, it is possible. It makes my work possible. But, when they are not, that is when things get extremely complicated. For instance, our LMS site is, right now constructed, in a way that I have limited access to the tool bar on the side. Whenever a link is not properly defined, I don't know it's there. If a link is in red instead of blue, I won't know that it's there. So, I won't be able to navigate and understand what I'm supposed to do with this site.

I believe, when a person with disability is hired, they usually already have their own somewhat successful strategies to perform their work and duties. Environments are not accessible. We know that. We adjust. So, through a very long process of trial and error, we are trying different things constantly, to make the environment work for us, so we can do our job. This goes beyond disability services, individual support, or enabling environments. At the end of the day, it's all about integration between my capabilities, skills, responsibility, and the conditions in which I operate. All this determines the way that I perform. So, it's not about a specific service. It's not about a specific environment. It's about the integration between what I can do, where I can do it, and how I can do it. Ask me. Ask me how I perform. It will help you to enable me to work in this environment.

While I see it is my responsibility to find the solution for any challenges that might arise, my experience is that a successful outcome depends on the ongoing dialogue and an enabling environment. I need to be proactive, to constantly acquire knowledge and skills – I'm the expert on how to manage and how to navigate my environment and work tasks. That's why the first thing that I did, once I was hired, was to engage in systematic research about disability issues and how they are addressed in La Trobe University. I searched through the website, consulted with my supervisors and mentors. I worked with equality and diversity. While I found broad statements, like these from the disability actions plans, translating those statements into action is not always a clear path.

For instance, if you look at the last one, "Make reasonable accommodation to the needs of staff with disability, ensuring staff are provided with relevant, adequate equipment." I had requested, and I received my equipment. But that took three months. Three months that I couldn't have perform at my job, that I was hired to do. Luckily, based on my experience, I came prepared with my own equipment and software. Otherwise, I wouldn't be able to work. Would you hire a person and not provide them with a computer? That's what it means for me to wait three months. For three months, I was unable to read and write unless I brought my own technologies.

Every time this system is inaccessible to me, I need to find a workaround, and that takes time and resources – both mine and the people around me. During my time here at La Trobe, I have encountered lots of good intentions – extremely empathic people that went out of their way to assist. Yet, in most cases, people simply don't know how to address disability issues, or – who should I contact? I've heard a lot, "I don't know," "I reckon," "There should be." Many of my colleagues embarked on a journey with me, to find an ad-hoc solution and answers, in a very responsive way. Is it meaningful? Yes. Is it productive? Not so much.

I believe that a more central and systematic approach may lead to a more sustainable outcome. For me, as a worker with a disability, accessibility is not a nice-to-have. It's a must-have. Going beyond compliance with accessible standards, engaging in an ongoing dialogue with students and staff with disability, will

enable the university, I believe, to better address disability-related issues and harness the capability of its workforce. Making disability a priority means prioritising productivity, efficiency and wellbeing. Thank you for listening.

Nicole Lee Okay. Good morning, everyone. I started here as a student last year. I hadn't had any contact with education since the mid-90s, in high school. So, making my way to university was a great, big leap forwards for myself. I guess, in a lot of ways, I might have set myself up to fail. I was expecting to find an environment that was welcoming, an environment that was fully adapted to my needs, or to everybody's needs. I was expecting to not come up against the barriers that I did. So, my first tutorial, coming to La Trobe University, I go to find the lift has broken down. Okay. I'm panicking. So, I go, and I ask somebody else outside that I saw sitting there in a wheelchair and I say, "Is there another lift to get up to the top of the Health Sciences 3" She said, "No, there isn't. I actually work on the fourth floor and I can't get into my office."

So, my very first tutorial, I couldn't access. So, the course coordinator apologised profusely and moved me to another tutorial in another part of the campus. So, the next day, I come along, and I go to that one, and it's over in Menzies College. The lecture theatre has no wheelchair access. I'm sitting outside, waiting, not knowing what to do, not sure who to go to.

These are disempowering moments, as an individual. I haven't been anywhere in education for such a long time. These are turning points where people turn away. This is tiring. We are constantly facing barriers everywhere else in our lives. If La Trobe University – you guys have the slogan, "All kinds of clever." I came here and I did not find all kinds of clever. I came here and got – there's only so many times that somebody can apologise, but it isn't going to make that flight of stairs go away, and it's not going to make that lift not broken.

For me, it really hasn't gotten much easier. The Equity and Diversity service staff in the university are fantastic, but it goes beyond services. Something that I would love to see this university do would be to fully adopt the social model of disability. Make this a little utopia. Make this a world where the students do want to actually come and learn. It's disheartening to hear from one of the scribes that they have got a student that has left La Trobe to go to another university because it is more accessible than this one. So, it goes beyond, as we were saying before, the built environment. In this room, coming in here today, the carpet is incredibly thick. So, coming up here onto this stage, I'm already tired. We wear down people's resilience with physical barriers. We wear down their ability to engage with the education that is on the table – to engage with the material that is being delivered to them in tutorials.

And then, we give them these online systems that – I don't have to identify whether I have a disability. It's already pretty evident. But, the one I usually don't tell people is that my mental health, on most days, can be more debilitating than my physical ability. So, navigating the LMS and all the different systems we have got is incredibly anxiety-provoking. There are so many different systems. Having to go through another one to enroll, another one to find your results, another one to deal with the parking, to get a permit for my car, to work out how to use Turnitin – all of these things – these are all barriers that wear down your resilience and, eventually, like Matt was saying – if your mental health is continuously impacted, you've got to start going, "Is this worth it? Am I going to burn out?" And, sadly, some people do. I started off as a full-time student. I'm now doing one subject at a time because I don't have the physical and mental energy to throw myself into anything more than that. I do have a lot of things outside of being a student, as well.

If we can change the systems, people don't have to ask, you know? I should be able to just go into a tutorial and be the same as all the other students. I think, at our meeting we had the other day, somebody pointed out, "Oh, but, we've done an accessibility audit. All the rooms are accessible." I can tell you right now that they are not. Even down to being accepted as an equal amongst the student body – I'd be treated differently. Every time I come to a tutorial, students are uncomfortable to sit next to me because I'm in a wheelchair. I did a little experiment. I came in my electric chair one day. Nobody came near me.

There's a lot of stigma around disability. So, there's a great understanding why people don't want to disclose. But, for a lot of us, we don't have a choice, and we do get 'othered', and it would be lovely to be accepted.

Accept me and accept other students as part of the student body. We are not just a number to be studied and researched. We are here to actually study and be treated like every other student, and to be fully included. Disability, accessibility, and the rise of calling out ableism is something that's changing at the moment, and I hope that La Trobe is on board with all of that, and it starts with inviting us to these conversations, to be on these boards and to be part of the decision-making, going forward. Thank you.

Undergraduate student. I have been a student of La Trobe University for almost 3 years now. I was diagnosed with Autism and Anxiety relatively late as a teenager and I am here today to talk a little bit about my experiences and the support I've had whilst attending university and how university might be made a little better for me or for others with autism and anxiety related conditions.

I attended a private high school and for the most part I really had very little support or accommodations made for me during this period of time. A lack of understanding by teachers meant that I was often regarded as a student who was otherwise capable but just didn't try hard enough or who was just plain lazy. Bullying from teachers wasn't uncommon and despite the odd year in which I had an exceptional teacher, this misunderstanding and lack of support usually led to my frustration and academic underachievement throughout high school. Starting university was a huge change from the predictable routine of school life and a very daunting experience for me but what I certainly didn't expect was that I would be entering into an environment where I was in fact more supported in comparison to how I was treated in high school.

My Disability support worker Julie has been an incredible source of support throughout my time at university and has implemented a Learning Access Plan or LAP for short which outlines some of the changes and arrangements to tests and examination processes and environments that I need in order to achieve my best at university. Like many autistic people I have slower processing speeds, and tasks like reading, writing and responding in a conversation can all take me longer than they do for most people. In the past, this had usually meant that even If I knew the answers to questions or what I wished to write I still wouldn't finish essays, tests or exams and so would receive much poorer grades than I was capable of achieving.

The stress and sensory bombardment caused by entering a room filled with hundreds of people can also make it very difficult for me to remain focused during exams and/or lectures. This is why having a LAP which provides extra time to complete tasks and exams, and allows me to take exams in a room with a fewer amount of people has been fantastic as I'm now able to fully complete exams and have been achieving some really good grades. I also have dysgraphia and having it written in my LAP that I cannot be marked down for poor handwriting has significantly eased my stress levels about written exams.

Some of the supports offered to all students rather than specific disability based supports have also been particularly beneficial to me. These include subject support workshops run in addition to regular tutorial classes that are occasionally on offer for certain subjects, as they enable time for some one on one support. Often the lecture theatres are too crowded, loud or bright for me to cope with so the flexibility of being able to watch lectures online as well as pause and re-watch them means I don't miss out on important information and can also keep up with the pace of the lecturer when taking notes. Being able to undertake university study part time and complete only one or two subjects per semester is one reason I am able to attend university at all and has prevented me from becoming too overwhelmed to continue with my studies, as well as enabling me to achieve better marks. Unfortunately, this has also limited my choices of study as it puts all 'full time only' courses out of reach for me, and no doubt for many other students.

A quick google search reveals the massive extent of autistic young people who feel socially isolated and excluded. One of my biggest struggles, and this is something I still find very challenging, upon transitioning from high school to university has been trying to fit in socially and connect with other students. I think one of the real misconceptions about autistic people is that we aren't interested in other people, and that we somehow have less desire or drive to connect with and form relationships with other people. For me at least, this couldn't be further from the truth and my wish to make friendships is just as strong as other peoples, the only difference is that I lack the opportunities, the skills and the confidence to try and make those connections. I feel quite lucky in that I have had the ability to source and am currently training my own assistance dog with the help of an organisation. Since acquiring my dog and putting quite a lot of effort into his training myself I have found that both my ability to engage in conversations with others along with my anxiety levels have improved dramatically. For the first time since starting university several years ago I have even been confident enough to spend some time on campus getting to know my way around, and I've recently presented an oral presentation to one of my class tutors without becoming mute and completely overcome with anxiety.

Whilst the academic and disability based support I have received since beginning university has been outstanding there hasn't been a great deal of social support available. Events such as orientation week and night club/alcohol based social events where typical students might make connections with others are highly unlikely to attract autistic people due to the extreme sensory environments that they take place in.

There are many groups and activity based clubs run by students of the university, however simply showing up for the first time to meet an unknown group of people and take part in an unstructured activity would very often be too overwhelming and hold too much uncertainty for an autistic person. To complicate matters, the sign up for these activities is usually held on open days and orientation weeks when large crowds are present and in my experience, it can be difficult to find out information about clubs, particularly at regional campuses, outside of these events.

When I first started university, I knew no one and this caused me such significant anxiety that I feel could cause other autistic students to not want to attend university at all. Having access to a support worker to help familiarize myself with the university grounds was a great initiative for outside of class but that support did not extend to within the classroom and I think that the University could definitely explore some avenues that could help address this, perhaps something like a buddy system in which a more experienced or confident student in the same class is assigned to work with the autistic student for the first few weeks of the semester so that student at least knows one other person in that class or even perhaps an integration aide support system for students with higher levels of anxiety or needs. I also strongly believe that a autism or disability specific social group, perhaps organised by staff or more mature students, or even a designated drop-in hub for autistic students would be incredible for helping autistic students at the University to make connections and feel as if they have a place at university where they fit in, or a safe place they can go to in order to recover from the sensory overload that can be triggered by the university environment and the hustle and bustle of university life.

Group work has been another challenge for me as it creates a lot of anxiety and feels a bit like I'm back in primary school again waiting to be picked last for a sports team. Naturally I understand the importance of group work and the opportunities it puts forth for gaining new skills and making connections with other students but I would suggest a better system for autistic students would be if groups are assigned by tutors when there is an autistic/anxious student in the class.

Hopefully some of the challenges I've faced whilst attending university and the suggestions I have put forth to help other students with autism can be taken on board. I have consulted with other autistic university students in coming up with these ideas and I do believe they accurately reflect both the needs of autistic and/or anxious students and the accommodations they require in order to succeed at university [written by the student and spoken by Christine].

Christine Bigby Thank you for coming all the way from Bendigo to be here today and to the other speakers. We have only a short time left for comments or questions.

Dr Rwth Stuckey. I am from Public Health. As a person with a disability I wasn't going to say anything, but I actually – then, I thought, "Why wasn't I going to say anything?" Because, I am someone who usually speaks out when I feel strongly about things. And, I realised it was personal. And, that's hugely different, but I think it's also one of the issues that sits behind this because, if you're advocating for something that's about yourself, you're often reluctant. Whereas, if you're advocating on behalf of others, it's much simpler. And, the reason that it's difficult is because it is so personal and, often, it's so exhausting.

So, my disclosure is that I've lived with a disability – a degenerative disease which fluctuates – for more than 30 years. So, for half my life. And, I ended up in academia simply because I couldn't manage working in industry anymore, because it was too many varied situations I had to deal with, on a day-to-day basis. I think one of the issues that has come out from the discussion today that is really important, that we need to address, is that not all disabilities are chronic. Some are acute. Some are fluctuating. Some are degenerative. Some are fixed. There is a whole variety of things going on. If we are looking at accommodations, we need to look at those variabilities, as well.

I think that disclosure is a really big issue. One of the problems around disclosure, for me, has been the stereotyping that goes with that. So, if disclosure is about diagnosis, there are immediately a whole lot of assumptions that go with what the diagnosis is, which may or may not be relevant. Disclosure shouldn't be about diagnosis. It should be about impact. What is the actual issue that you have to deal with? When I first started here, one of the first things I got as a lecturer was problems with giving lectures from my wheelchair, where I was sitting behind a screen in a tiered room, and the students couldn't see me because I was hidden by the screen. And, there were all these emails that flew around when I said, "What I need is a microphone," which kept talking about the wheelchair-bound lecturer. And, I decided to suck it up because the main battle was not about the offensive and dehumanizing language being used, and I need to pick my battles. What I needed was a microphone. And then, people were really offended, I was told, because there had been adjustments to those lecture theatres which enabled the desk to go up and down. It enabled it to go up, so you could sit or stand, but it didn't think about the fact that, if you couldn't stand, no one could see you.

So, really simple things like that. What ended up happening in those discussions – I am an ergonomist and an occupational therapist. I know what my needs are. And, I think that comes through very strongly. People with disabilities usually know exactly what they need. So, eventually, I asked someone in occupational health and safety – because I had gone to get some help from Equity and Diversity and I was told that wasn't for staff. It was only for students. That's really important and really offensive. And, what the person in health and safety said, eventually said was, "Hear what she wants. She knows what she needs." Because, the person knew me as they had previously worked with me. But it shouldn't need to rely on other people knowing who you are and what your competency is. It should be asking what your needs are and actually addressing them, functionally.

The other thing – Julie mentioned language in our Welcome to Country and I think language is really important. 'The wheelchair-bound lecturer' was pretty offensive. I'm pretty tough and I dealt with a lot of really challenging situations and a lot of bizarre preconceptions that are disconcerting and sometimes very entertaining. But, I think people are often too careful around language, and this can actually cause as much difficulty as not being careful as they are too scared to address the issues. I would prefer to have someone ask in a caring manner but with inappropriate language than having them pretend there is no issue out of embarrassment. And, working out what language is appropriate to ask questions– and, a really simple one is, "Are you okay?" And, that's done a lot with mental illness, now, but seemingly only in addressing concerns around mental illness. I suggest "Are you okay" and "what do you need?" It's very simple.

I think the concept of universal design is important – this isn't new. This has been around since the '80s when we had that extraordinarily named "year of the handicapped". We have moved, mostly, beyond that, but that language is still sometimes used. Really simple things like making sure we have got lifts that work. And, when they don't work, they get fixed fast, because I need to get to my office sometimes, and I can't. And, lots of other people are affected in that way. With an ageing workforce, as well, there's a whole lot of impacts that are coming, simply from ageing, that we need to start addressing. So, that's enough from me.

Postgraduate research student and sessional staff member*.* I'm actually a casual staff member. I'm also a PhD student, and I also have a disability. So, the first thing I want to say is, I do actually agree that, in terms of having somewhere where you can actually go for solitude – I think the lady before mentioned – when the overload does become too much. I had a situation at university and I realised there wasn't anywhere to go except the bathroom to actually recover. My epilepsy is actually triggered by fatigue. So, even when I don't have enough food or get too hungry, I can actually have seizures.

I guess, in terms of working, and as a research student, I realised that having a learning access plan - having extra time to write in an exam and extra time to submit my assignment –didn't actually accommodate my needs research students. In terms of the fatigue, I guess being able, physically and psychologically have somewhere to recover, have a rest. And then, other PhD students have mentioned having something like a nap room or something, where you do have that solitude. You don't have other people thinking [what's happening] you have those bean bags in the Donald Whitehead Building but you don't want to have a nap there, with everyone watching you, especially as a tutor, as I'm a tutor as well. You've got those couches as well but at the same time, you've got people walking past. Again, like I said, I try to avoid intense situations. But, it's like, "Where can I go to actually recover?" Not necessarily for someone to help me out, but just to have somewhere – to build up strength in myself.

Another issue, I am part-time because I do have that restriction to my energy and the work, which means I do about 20 hours per week. But, at the same time, needing to work, as well, for the income, because I'm not on a scholarship and the government doesn't support me, as a research student. So, I do have to actually work. And, I realised, at first, when I started teaching, that I have more seizures after intensive periods of work. In terms of this semester, at the start of the degree, I could have the learning access plan, but I realised that doesn't help. The government or the University could take more action to support me to work and study. Accommodations could be very important. The pressure there, as well, to actually be teaching and working at the same time, and not even just as a PhD student – as a research student – but for other research students, as well, who are not on scholarships but also need to teach. They need to be considered. Thank you.

Associate Professor Christopher Fisher I'm going to keep it very brief. First, I want to thank everyone who's spoken today about their experiences. It means a lot to me, personally, to have your stories shared with us. So, thank you for that. In terms of La Trobe's strategy with the Board, one of the things I wanted to bring up is, also, support for staff who want to learn the best ways to work with differently abled people. We don't really have that support. I had that experience recently, within my own research centre, where we have a student who has self-disclosed and we immediately started reaching out to La Trobe for support with that, and we had nothing. "Good luck." So, we need to do that, and quickly.

Christine Bigby Thank you. Just on that note some of the research we undertook a couple of years ago showed very clearly – and, I think we've heard from the students, too – that, as a staff body, we are really empathetic and very concerned, and want to do the best in this field. But, actually, we don't have the infrastructure or the institutional support to make that happen in an effective way. Over half of the staff that we interviewed said, actually, they had never had any training around disability-related issues. In wrapping up I want to flag that we are developing terms of reference for a disability subcommittee of Education Committee, which will be a point of reference around academic policies and practice around disability and help to monitor the actions from the disability action plan that are related to teaching and learning and broader academic issues. It will also provide a forum for continual input and feedback from both students and staff, so that we can have a focal point.

Be aware, too, that there will be a series of consultations about the disability action plan that will be led from HR. So, there will be opportunities for people to have input. All of those ideas that we have heard today will go into that consultation, and there is an opportunity for everybody to have some input. Some information coming out in the next couple of weeks, I understand.

Once again, thank you, everybody, for contributing today and for sharing your experiences.