Beyond orientation: Supporting First Year Success - a 'Students First' Symposium

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Prof Judyth Sachs Good morning, everyone. I'm Judyth Sachs and I'm the Chief Academic Officer of Studiosity. And I have the pleasure today to introduce a panel of exceptional practitioners, scholars and academics who are experts in the field of first year experience. But before we start, I wish to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of lands across Australia as the continuing custodians of country and culture dating back to the creation of the dreaming. So... The plan for today is I'm going to invite each of the panel members to introduce themselves and why they're here. There've been some questions that I've put together and there are some questions that have already come in from people who are participating. Let me just emphasise, you can see only three faces. We tried to get a student and despite our very best efforts, students are working hard to make sure that they get through the first year experience or second year experience. We are very aware that we don't have a student, but it was not for want of trying. So Sally, can I get you to introduce yourself, please?

Prof Sally Kift So thank you, Judyth. I've put my Acknowledgement of Country in the chat for everyone. So delighted to be here. Thank you, Studiosity, for the invitation. I just come with an inquiring mind constantly about first year experience. I was so lucky back in the day to have got a national senior fellowship on the first year experience. It makes me pause again and wish that we had and a continuation of a Learning and Teaching Council type opportunity. It is in there in the Accord report, recommendation 30 little H Roman numerals three, but we live in hope. I'm just learning constantly and very happy that everything is old, that old is new again in relation to first year. So thank you.

Prof Ryan Naylor Hi everyone, I'm Ryan Naylor. I'm currently an academic at the University of Sydney. My research area is particularly around barriers to success in higher education. So if you've heard of my name before, it might be around the first year experience, but particularly focused on equity students and policy for supporting students from non-traditional backgrounds.

Sarah Bendall Hi everyone. I'm coming to you from Bunurong country in Bayside Melbourne and I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and extend those respects to everyone here today online. I'm very new in to the higher education sector. I've recently been appointed as the first assistant ombudsman for the new National Student Ombudsman which is a new dispute resolution service, that's independent of government and the sector, that's being stood up under the Universities Accord and the National Action Plan to address gender-based violence in higher education. And so we're here to hear from students if they have complaints about any actions taken by a higher education provider. So I'm really looking forward to joining this conversation today to share some early insights about how the NSO is going, what we're hearing from students and just hear from you all about all the great things that we can do to ensure that first year students have a good experience.

Prof Judyth Sachs Thanks, Sarah. And to the members of the 90 people that are now listening, if you've got a question, can you put it under Q&A rather than chat? But chat, I look at both, but chat is about the chat between you and the panel. But Q& A is something that I can pick up and ask questions. So, Sarah, you've actually landed the first question, and I deliberately am asking you the first question because the National Student Ombudsman's Office is

relatively new. Could you actually tell us what your remit is and what success will look like when you're well into the job?

Sarah Bendall That is a great question, Judyth, and is on my mind all the time. So I started answering this one earlier. And so the National Student Ombudsman is a team of around 60 staff, we're housed in the office of the Commonwealth Ombudsman. And we are here to handle complaints from students of the higher education sector about any actions taken by a higher education provider. Our jurisdiction doesn't extend to VET students. So just keep that in mind. And we're, as I said, established under the Universities Accord. So our key focus is really to ensure that all students of higher education receive a safe and high quality education. And so our role is just to, I guess, support individual complaint resolution, but to amplify the voice of students to affect systemic change across the sector and within institutions to achieve that goal. So we very much see ourselves as as supporting the sector to achieve the Universities Accord and that goal of safe and high quality services for students.

Prof Judyth Sachs Without breaching confidentiality, what are the nature of some of the complaints or inquiries? Let me say inquiries that students bring to your office.

Sarah Bendall Yeah, we can definitely say complaints. I'm definitely one of those lifelong complaints handlers that think that complaints are an opportunity for free feedback and not something to be concerned about. So we've received, well, we've been open for three months, as I said. We opened on the 1st of February, and we received our first complaint within 15 minutes of opening. That was a Saturday. And since then, we've received around 1,100 contacts from students, which is much more than we anticipated. We projected about 1,500 contacts for a year. So we're at 1, 100 within three months. Of those, 900 are complaints. And I think, It's fair to say, and we've got a lot of work to do to unpack our data, but if we're talking about the top three categories of complaints, the most common, so around 32%, are complaints that fit under the broad umbrella of what we call 'course administration'. And they're about service delays, administrative errors, poor communication or misinformation about things like course withdrawals, refund of money, recognition of prior learning. The provision of degree certification and arrangements for workplace integrated learning. So they're

the main things that are going wrong and that includes first year students as well. The second category is what we call health and safety, discrimination and inadequate support. So around 21% of complaints are about those things and that's as you would expect complaints about gender-based violence, discrimination. University complaints processes and support services. And the third one Judyth is unmet academic requirements and misconduct matters. So they're making up about 15% of complaints and they are complaints and this surprised me probably because I am new into the sector but maybe it shouldn't have but these are complaints about what students are perceiving to be inadequate, unfair or unreasonable approaches to their requests for special consideration, appeals, misconduct and exclusion processes.

Prof Judyth Sachs So quite a broad remit. So how can people who are the now 112 people that are participating, how can they find out about you? But more importantly, how can they socialise students to use you effectively so that there aren't, so the complaints can actually be resolved at the university first rather than coming to you?

Sarah Bendall So we've been doing a lot of engagement with the sector on exactly that and with students as well. We are an escalated complaint service, which means that, you know, we agree that the best way to maintain the relationship between the institution and the student is to resolve complaints at the lowest possible level as quickly as possible. So that's the message that we're sending. We are encouraging students to have a go resolving it with their providers first. But we have actually found that a number of students that come to us don't know that they can complain to their universities first. And this encompasses students that have had a go resolving it with their faculties and it hasn't resolved and they haven't then understood that they go to the university's complaints team or students that just haven't known what to do in the first place. So I think in terms of what people can do, it would be just to make sure that your communication to students is really clear about your own central complaints services, as well as ensuring that they can come to the NSO if they haven't been able to resolve it directly with their provider first. When I've had a look at websites, I have to confess, I found them a little confusing on this point. There's a lot of information about complaints processes there. And, you know, when you think about the context of a complaint about an academic appeal, where this is a new process for a student who, from what we've seen, is often struggling from something that's

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happened in their life. That's really the usual student that finds themselves in those processes. Having to navigate a really complex complaints process is really difficult. So my best advice would be to try and simplify that process.

Prof Judyth Sachs Look, Stuart Allen asked a question, are there populations in your complaints cohort who are overrepresented?

Sarah Bendall Stuart, I'm really glad you've asked that question because it gives me an opportunity to highlight international students. And I should preface this by saying our data is evolving. We've only been open for three months. So this is just really what we're seeing in the first few months. But over the last six weeks, we've made mandatory in our case management system recording whether a student is an international student or a domestic student. And since doing that, we've noticed that around 45% of contacts are from international students. So that's disproportionate to the number of international students we have in the country. And I think this is really important because, of the complaint types that I outlined before, international students are complaining about the same things, but the impact on them by virtue of the visa overlay and the other vulnerabilities they have, for example, you know, not being able to work to the same level as a domestic student - means that these complaints have a greater impact on their life. So, you know, delay in refunding money, for example, for an international student, is massive. It means, being able to make a rental payment or not or you know buy food or not.

Prof Judyth Sachs Okay. All right. Thanks a lot. Let's move on to Sally and Ryan. So Sally, why don't we start with you and then I'll get Ryan to follow up. In terms of your experience and understanding of the literature, what are the challenges facing students as they transition into the first year? And deliberately, it's the broad church of students. It's not school leavers. It is international students, it's mature age students. So, Sally, what about you start off?

Prof Sally Kift Okay, thanks very much for that Judyth and I see in the chat also much appreciation to Sarah for explicating what's going on there and almost everything that Sarah has already identified is part of the rich tapestry of the complex processes that first year students face on entry into university. So the challenges of transitioning into first year are very complex and

complicated and very personally experienced by every individual student in their individual institution environment and touch points, as they go across many transitions across the first year, both micro and macro. So it's not just a one point in time, it's a big hurdle or a bump to get over. It's, you know, it waxes and wanes and different things come into focus. So I suppose I should also say, before I'm critiqued on this basis, that there are a lot of positives about first year transition, but it's difficult for students to embrace the positives when they're feeling absolutely overwhelmed in their early uncertainty, unknowing and ambiguity, if I could put it that way, in their continuous transitions. And this is especially so for equity-deserving students, and I think you only really need to think about, you know, the big transitions that they're making even for a moment to start having some empathy for what they're going through. The equity deserving students may or may not have had the opportunity to acquire the necessary social and navigational capital that they need to settle in easily and make those early adjustments to essentially very unfamiliar environments with this whole lot of language. And they're big and continuous transitions not just into learning but across as Sarah's just pointed out to us, you know, a range of administrative matters, and I know Ryan's written on structural inequities in higher education, and particularly drawn attention to the administrative area, as a matter that is deserving of attention. But when you think about first year students, they're making transitions academically, socially, administratively, environmentally, culturally, you know, across the whole range. And we could ask the question, and what do they get in response from us? And don't tell anyone, it's a secret. Usually, as Sarah's just said, quite impenetrable systems, somewhat inflexible processes with what Luke Millard from Scotland has called attritional language. So deficit type language and a surfeit of jargon and poor inter-service coordination. And then they get to do the difficult or hard learning. So I suppose I'm just trying to suggest it's a psychosocial process of becoming for students; being, belonging, and becoming. They're going through significant identity transformations. They've got an aspect of their prior student role, sorry, prior personage role. Then the early ideas of what it is to be a student and early ideas also of what is to a professional. And so they're mixing all that up and they're trying to get from here to there some way through primarily uncharted, unfamiliar terrain with the least culture shock as possible. So it can be a very othering experience and I'll try and put a link into the chat. There's a great, sorry, Sarah, this is where I'm at at the moment. I feel like I've got to explain it to you. There's great open access book on imposter

syndrome. Added the back, off the back of COVID, a big survey done by WonkHE and Pearson in the UK found that 4 out of 10 students felt that they were imposters and didn't belong or didn't have the capability to be engaging in higher education. So. We've got work to do around building confidence and competence. I'll put the link into that if I can in the chat.

Prof Judyth Sachs Ryan. Can you add your sixpence?

Prof Ryan Naylor Well, it's always very challenging to follow Sally with something like that. So I'll give a kind of cubist approach by taking what she said and emphasising different aspects of it. It might be helpful to think of it as dividing it up into three different aspects of the system. So first, from a student's point of view, we know that many students, even the ones we would say are traditional students, still living at home, supported by their parents, school leavers, are much more time poor than they used to be, are much more financially poor. And this is particularly emphasised for those who aren't in that group. Placement poverty is a real issue. Oz study is patently inadequate. International students frequently don't have sufficient financial support, community support, everything else, you know, exploitative work conditions, all of those sorts of things that impact their experience during study but are driven by those financial needs. Mental health is a particular issue and I think one that the sector has been becoming more aware of over the last 10 to 15 years and we can see all of these things bleeding through in six-year completion rates and retention rates and the retention rates for specific groups as well. So that's kind of the student side of things and the institutional side of things we've already talked about the the inflexibility and the impenetrability of our systems but that's everything from programs, I know there's a question about reasonable adjustment for disability coming up, but those disability support systems are often very flexible and very inaccessible, unapproachable. Assessment inauthentic assessment is still a real problem and very widespread, I think. Administration deadlines, policy, even things like travel time. So just to give you an anecdote from the University of Sydney. We teach from eight to, I think, eight every day. And so broadly speaking, when you are scheduled is out of your hands as an academic. So our nursing cohort in particular has lectures that start at eight. But a lot of our nursing students live in Western Sydney. So to make it to campus by 8 a.m., they're leaving home at 5.30, those sorts of things. Or getting up at 5.30 perhaps. And a simple policy change would be that, you

know, we recognise we need to teach over this period, but first year is a particular time where, as Sally's very eloquently said, that transition is particularly in focus and the sense of identity is emerging, the connection to the institution is not solid yet. And so, you now, a very simple policy change would to say first year must be taught between nine and six, even. But we don't have that policy. And it's the kind of the blindness or the lens of fairness rather than equity that conceals that for us. There's all sorts the institutional side of things, but I think there's also a third aspect here, which is the sociocultural context, because I know from talking to students that many of them are concerned about kind of the more existential questions about higher education in the world, you know, the nature and value of a university degree in the face of climate change, economic change, whether the degree will ever... Reimburse the cost, the opportunity costs of studying, whether their degrees will have value in a world that is dominated by AI. And I know this because I did an exercise with my first year students a couple of weeks ago and these are the sorts of things they said were barriers affecting them in their studies. Whereas of course I was expecting them to say things like 'I don't know when my assignments are due' and 'I can't use Canvas'. It's important for us to be aware of these bigger contextual questions about the nature and value of higher education and study, alongside both the student-focused barriers and the barriers that institutions are putting up unnecessarily in many cases to make things harder.

Prof Judyth Sachs So in listening to the two of you, it seems as though to me and my experience having worked in universities for a long time as well, that the transition is actually really more about a state of becoming at a state of being, but it's actually conceptualised within the institution as a static moment. So the transition happens at the end of the first semester, and then you're on your own and what needs to happen. And what I was, I was hearing you say in particular, Ryan, is that there are a whole lot of structural impediments. There are some process impediments, there are cultural impediments in terms of the assumptions about what it means to be a first year student. But there are also pedagogical and resource impediments. Can I ask both of you just to reflect on what does it mean to be a student transitioning into university? So why don't we start with you, Sully.

Prof Sally Kift Well, it's hard emotional and intellectual labour, isn't it, to be, become, and belong, particularly when you don't know what it is you're trying

to be, become, and belong to. And as some colleagues at QUT back in the day said, there's a, just looking at the organisational behaviour literature, but also the social cognitive emotional aspect of- There's a letting go of your previous identity, so there's a period of almost grief in that as they try to move into these other concurrent states that they, transitionary states that they occupy as a beginning student and as a beginning professional. But it's also really difficult if we don't make it easier, do it better for them, which we inevitably don't. Thinking about those various matters that Ryan has raised, and we know from latest investigations into all of engagement, belonging, transitions. There's a lot of intense research in the space at the moment. It is very individual. But it's also a matter of how you keep your own identity, how you maintain and how we value, accommodate and respect the individuality that's bought. Because surely we're not asking students to undo themselves when they come to us. This is all supposed to be an enhancement and advancement phase. So unpacking the hidden curriculum, for example, around the attritional language and the jargon. And identifying what students need to do to be successful across the broard remit, and perhaps there'll be an opportunity later on to talk about my favourite subject, which is we could do that all through the curriculum in ways that could help students make that transition, because it's not as if we don't know. We know what's going to happen when they come into higher education. We know the inevitability of the barriers. Orientation is a process over time rather than a point in time. Michelle Morgan in the UK talks about a re-induction at the beginning of second year, difficult of course to try and understand what that actually looks like given the number of students that are doing part time. But we should be able to manage and mitigate the confusion and the uncertainty because we know what the journey looks like and do 'just in time, just for me, just in case' communications, not just about the learning but about all the other matters. Including the ones that Ryan mentioned. I also put a comment in the chat, that timetabling is one of the biggest impediments to students' engagement in higher education because we can't expect students nowadays to come on campus for a one-hour experience when it might take them two hours to get there if they're coming from Western Sydney over to the glory that is the University of Sydney in the CBD. And the poverty issue, student poverty in the cost of living crisis is one of the biggest impediments to higher education access, participation, and success and we need to be thinking quite seriously about what we can do to mitigate that and a number of institutions for example now have financial inclusion access plans. So a

genuine upfront statement about how not just from a deficit, not at all from a deficit perspective how we can encourage financial literacy, the plans produced off the back of staff and students working together on them, and then do things like open access resources and the timetabling piece, and be very clear about where the expenses might be in anticipation, for example, of placement poverty. But now we'll have for, I don't know, was it about 68,000 students, I think, from 1 July across a range of disciplines that may be alleviated.

Prof Ryan Naylor So I want to emphasise Sally's point about transition being ongoing throughout, you know, it's transition through, transition back, transition out, all of those sorts of things. Because, you know when we, I think universities have fallen often into the trap of operationalising transition as maybe, you know, the week of orientation, and then stuff we do in first year, and then you're all - it's the Wild West from then on in. So I do think that it needs to be much, our understanding of transition needs to develop and the way that we embed and systematise that needs to change. But I'll share another anecdote about some work I was doing with some students in the US. So these are students doing a Masters of student development. So they are intending to take on what we would call professional student support roles in American universities. And to blow Sally's transition pedagogy horn, I think transition pedagogy is a pedagogy and therefore needs explicit teaching about transition and transition skills. And so the work I was doing with these students was a Delphi series of interviews about what they thought were the threshold learning concepts you needed to learn to be successful at university. And one of the ones that came out from this, which is their wording, but really has stuck with me, is that students need to learn how to survive in a system that is not set up for them. And this is the phrasing of students themselves. And I find that such a, I mean, I'm tempted to just say bleak, but. Such a nuanced understanding of how university systems support and don't support student transition and the first year experience. And I think if we can keep in mind that this is how students are experiencing universities and start to adjust that. It's going to be a long adjustment, but it's an adjustment that I think we need to make.

Prof Judyth Sachs It's sort of a bit depressing. We know a lot about transition. And you both have all indicated these are the things that are happening. These are the things that students are saying. What's getting in the way of us

to put in place processes, structures, pedagogies and policies and to resource it effectively so that we don't get a repetition of the same sort of complaints. Sally, what do you reckon?

Prof Sally Kift See, now you've tapped into my favourite subject. So I'll come at it a different way first, before tooting my own horn around curriculum. We seem to have been very slow to get to whole of institution approaches around this. We treat everything as a cottage industry. And they're quite ad hoc and reflective and reactive. Approaches to every - reproaches was a bit Freudian, approaches to these, which never get scaled and make the navigation of them in an unfamiliar process, obscure environment very, very difficult. So what I would say about that is the national gender guidelines, I'm sorry, Sarah, you might have taught me with what they're called again. They've got a wonderful section in it which I've taken out already on what a whole provider approach might look like around gender-based violence. And they run across the gamut of all the possible intersections and the touch points between students and the institution. I think we need to be clearer about what whole provider, whole-of-institution approaches look like, and aim for that. In the United Kingdom, might, sorry, might be England only, the Office for Students now require for access and participation plans to take a whole provider approach and explicate what a whole-provider approach might look like, which universities over there, not dissimilar to universities here, go, we don't actually know what that looks like, so can we get some training on that, please, and thank you. So there's a starting point. And I might get to curriculum later, which I'm going to curse myself about a bit...

Prof Judyth Sachs No, I'll give you the opportunity.

Prof Sally Kift No, but I'll get to it a bit later on because I'm very taken now with the idea of universal design across the whole of the university remit. So not just universal design for learning, but universal design to anticipate and accommodate diversity, particularly in the face of Trumpian anti-DEI approaches. If we get this so embedded and so enmeshed in the university systems, so that students come to inclusive excellence into an inclusive environment that is anticipated and embraces their diversity and difference rather than problematises and relegates it and says, well, you go and fix yourselves and then come back and try and engage with learning when you've done that, then I think we're a long way down the path. So a whole of

institution with a universal design approach, that of course feeds into curriculum with universal design for learning and universal design for assessment and all these other matters and universal support. But we are talking about a fundamental reset of educational purpose for institutions where they focus themselves in the way that they present their core business around learning and teaching as if learning and teaching was important and students and engagement and success is important to them.

Prof Judyth Sachs Ryan let me throw it across to you and then, Sarah, I'd like to, before I ask my next question, get some sort of reflections from a bureaucracy on what's been said by Sally and Ryan. So Ryan, over to you.

Prof Ryan Naylor Again, I completely agree with Sally. I think that the cultural inertia of universities is a real barrier. So I think that for the whole sector to move, there's going to have to be federal policy intervention. It's clear that often that is what it takes the universities to respond, particularly to respond as a group. Also, in terms of the academic workforce, you know, the gateway to an academic position. And for many students, I don't want to diminish the role of third space academics and professional support because they are, you know, professional staff members, I mean, because libraries are a fundamental aspect of this; student support services, education designers, all of those sorts of things. They're all fundamental parts of this solution. But the face of the university for many students in their experience is still the academics who are teaching them. And the gateway to academia is the PhD, which is a research programme. It's not anything to do with the sorts of things that we are talking about that will make a difference to students and their experience. And then conceivably, there are many of our colleagues who that is the last piece of CPD they will ever do. You know. Advance HE fellowships and things are available for recognition and people might go for that for promotion, but it's not really a CPD thing. And so if we want people to be informed about transition and new models of curriculum and how to respond to AI, we need to move past the people who turn up to those seminars being the ones who are already on board and already willing, and find ways to... Reach and reward the, you know, the non core believers, I suppose.

Prof Judyth Sachs So Sarah, you've been listening to some interesting perspectives, but they're common in terms of that, in fact, they're not

necessarily student oriented, they are much more fragmented and serve the interest of the institution. But what are you hearing, Sarah? And what advice would you give to universities?

Sarah Bendall Well, I mean, this conversation has been so fascinating so far. And I feel a sense of, well, in a way, perverse positivity in that the complaints that we're receiving so directly reinforce the points that Sally and Ryan are talking about that clearly, as you've been saying, Judyth, are known challenges. And I guess that really raises my first reflection, which is that at this point, I feel that something that the sector could do better is to genuinely listen to students. Because, as you say, we know what the problems are. And that's a common feature of the 1,100-odd contacts that we're getting through the door that students are not feeling listened to. And if we did listen better to what students are saying, even within the complaints context. Then we could actually affect an outcome for them. I mean, sometimes there won't be the outcome that the student wants, but regardless of that, that presents an opportunity for systemic improvement. And so I guess that leads to my second reflection, which is that great leadership is so important. And I'm hearing that clearly from Ryan and Sally, really good leadership is needed for cultural change at the meta level and at the micro level. I was on a panel with George Williams a couple of months ago and he was saying that when he started at Uni of Western Sydney he declared that 2025 was going to be the 'year of the student' and then he went on to say that but you know what he didn't tell his staff at the time was that every year from now on would be a 'year of the student'. I think that he has really made efforts to demonstrate that leadership, to really connect with the students and understand what the challenges are for students. And so I think that, you know, that type of effort put into wanting to maximise the student experience for all students is fantastic. And that leadership needs to be reflected at every level of the institution. So I think that that opportunity to, for any staff member to take up their authority and invest their energy in doing everything they can within their role to improve the student experience is really worthwhile. So when a complaint does come through the door or you hear about a complaint that relates to your faculty, just thinking about what potentially could you do to maximise the systemic improvement and invest the energy and the time in doing that and really pushing the envelope on that, is needed. So it's kind of top down and bottom up as well. And then I think just a basic obvious point reflection would be, just resourcing. I think that this connects to that kind of

meta leadership. It's clear that some teams within the institutions that we've engaged with are not resourced sufficiently to do any of the things that I'm talking about. And that requires some bold decision making on where funds go because this sector is so fantastic and so worthwhile and everybody I talk to who works in the sector is fantastic and really sees that vision of student experience. So it is about having institutions that enable staff to make those improvements and I'm not sure we're there yet as a sector on that one.

Prof Judyth Sachs Thank you, that was a nice pulling together. So I'm gonna give both Ryan and Sally an opportunity to, I'm inviting you to, Universities Australia has brought together as a matter of urgency and importance, the need to revisit and reshape student transition and student success. Sally, what would be the three important points that you would wanna communicate? I know, we'd be here all afternoon, so. And three is, you know, at least manageable. So, Sally, what would be the messages you'd want to communicate to them? And then what would success look like for you to feel confident that they'd listened?

Prof Sally Kift . Thank you. That would be fun. The unpopular option that I've already put in the chat would be to imagine we had a Higher Education Standards Framework that actually mentioned curriculum and talked about universal design, which it currently does not do. So this goes to the imperative around improving the quality of learning and teaching and curriculum design within the institution and Ryan's touched on it. And it does seem to be a continuing sacred cow around the fact that we don't require educational qualifications for university learning and teaching. The Accord was all over that and made some bold and warranted recommendations around, well we can work backwards, continuing professional development because we are the professional teachers. Requiring an entry-level qualification, teaching qualification, and then getting better data so that we could see. So that was the last part of your question about how we could actually determine whether we're being successful or not. The data is so lagged, I give a plug for the 'Needed Now' that I curate series piece this week by Jenna Cadby from ACSES, the Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success which talks about their recent report on retention. Which is now starting to fall back a bit. It's only slipped by about 1% over a period of time, but it's gone up and coming back, but also makes the very clear point that most, all of our survey work is tainted by survivorship bias because we only survey and ask students

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who have managed to survive in terms of what Ryan's students were telling him. So the ones that survived despite us, tell us why they might consider leaving, but we don't actually have clear data, though I think we can extrapolate, but we need that evidence base to understand why students aren't surviving in our institutions. So a range, I'm gonna call that my first point, which wasn't very coherent. My second point would be around curriculum design, and that was the essence of... Acknowledge a conflict with transition pedagogy was just the simple idea that rather continually problematising student difference and distance from support services, we drive everything that students need for success through the curriculum and we can drive so much of it. We can drive the comms through the curriculums. Students won't necessarily look at the communications, they won't look at whole of university spamming emails but they will look things that come from their teachers in their subjects. So this, I realise this is not a small ask, it's a big ask, but if you were talking outside our university bubble, I think the public, whoever they might be, would be alarmed to hear that we would be constantly saying we need to do better in terms of inclusive, coherent, scaffolded and relevant curriculum design, curriculum that's optimally organised, sequenced and managed so that we don't do harm in terms of mental wellbeing that we currently do, big impost on the curriculum, on mental health if it's not designed well. That we specifically develop the academic skills and literacies that students, we know students need to be successful in the discipline, but we don't do it, this is my problem with the Support for Students policy which I know was great, but it very much reinforced again, don't expect to get any support; academic learning support in the curriculum, in your discipline context, you all go right over there somewhere and we'll monitor all of that. For me, that all needs to be embedded in the curriculum and just to drive home the message again. I don't want my law students, for example, going up and doing decontextualise academic integrity and referencing workshops where they learn about this weird APA thing. We do footnotes and we're very proud of it, but that's the discipline context in which they need to be assisted. So we can drive the relationship-rich education - again, good for mental health and wellbeing and belonging - through the curriculum because we make structured opportunities available for students to interact with their peers and with their staff. We proactively manage the micro and macro transitions. We do the hard work on assessment. On assessment skills and feedback literacies. We build evaluative judgement with students' need for lifelong learning now. So I

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think that's my second pitch and it's the difference between moving from a deficit student in need of fixing themselves through self-curated remediation to a university for all ethos. My third piece would be, and Ryan's touched on it as well, is around the cross-institutional staff-student partnerships. So again, transition pedagogy started right off in the very beginning. I've only had to remind myself of this. We were modelling when we developed that, academic and professional staff working together, including the third-phase space professionals that were proved so important over COVID. So Sarah, that sort of in-house lingo about blended learning advisors, for example, who do all the silo boundary hopping to make it all come together and work, and we worked with students to develop what needed to happen. So I think we need new ways of working, new ways of institutional working and recognition of that, working with students as partners and working with valued integrated practise professionals, because it takes the proverbial village to raise and support a student to be successful.

Prof Judyth Sachs Right thank you, that was fantastic. And particularly your your view on curriculum, but I also heard that in fact, and it's, it's not surprising, everything's fragmented in universities, everything is a piece of territory. And it's territory that has to be fought over. So how do you get that joined up view, and how do you get that interconnected, relationship-based and about partnership? Because at the end of the day, everybody's got the same outcome. Where do we need to make some adjustments? And then I'll get back to get Ryan to give me his three points.

Prof Sally Kift I'll try and do it quickly, but COVID was the big stress test for us, and I think the situation that we've now got to is it is just not possible for a siloed discipline academic to be working in their siloed subject and manage to mediate a positive and successful student experience that transverses all of the various things we've spoken about today all by their lonesome, as my kids used to, well, they never use the word lonesome, but 'all by my own', as my kids used to say. We need no one in a working institution any longer is an island. So we need, so I, and I would say, but it's, I take some comfort from the fact it seems to have struck a chord in the UK in their mental, in their University Mental HealthCharter, which I'd love to talk about at great length somewhere else. So much better than what we have here and includes staff and students. It includes not just support services, it includes what happens with transitions and learning. And they adopted the second edition of the

University Mental Health Charter has adopted the generational approach to transition pedagogy, where we leave everything on the outside of the curriculum for students to get support, where we could do it from a curriculum-based perspective and then the third generation approach where it's whole of institution. So this is hard, difficult, unglamorous work. It requires us to to break down the silos. I think we showed that we could do it over COVID, but we slipped back into lax ways. But it is the best way we can support everyone within the university, to support the students as we know how. And it enables the driving. So solo academics don't have to be mental health professionals. They don't have to language and learning advisor experts. They don't have to be careers and development employability staff experts. They don't have to be instructional design experts because we've got all that expertise in the university so everyone sits around the curriculum redesign table and we just keep iterating.

Prof Ryan Naylor So, immodestly, to answer Joe's question in the chat about models that we've seen that work, I have co-authored a couple of papers with Sarah Cox about some cross-silo intra-university partnerships between academics and professional staff, so I commend them to you. I'm sure there are other better examples out there as well, but those are the ones I have at the top of my mind. So for my three things, I, and again, try not to repeat anything Sally's already said. I think flexibility and accessibility are the fundamental keys to everything. And particularly through curriculum. Which Sally has already said. So when we talk about universal design, relational teaching, students as partners, even things like financial support, it's the fundamental principle here is about flexibility and accessibility. I'd also, just to step back a little bit to Sarah's last point about leadership, I completely agree that leadership is important, but goodwill doesn't get us all the way and we need to put our money where our mouth is, so things need to be funded, and funded on non-soft money systems or schemes so that you don't have your staff wondering whether they're going to have a job every October for the following year. If you don t have that kind of continuity and you're not able to build institutional knowledge and the relationships that we've just been talking about as being so important, then these things are just destined never to get out of first gear. So funding is essential and recognition and reward for the people involved is equally important. I don't know that that necessarily has to be like formal recognition. Often informal recognition will do the job. People are happy when they are recognised and given a pat on the head just

for the work that they've done. But formal recognition is still a really important aspect here. And if that recognition can support the breaking down of silos and the building of relationships, so it's not just, you know, we as the individual champions, then so much the better. And then my third point is I think that in the future, if not now, I think it's probably already becoming true. The institutions that know their students best will be the ones that... Succeed. They're the ones that will flourish in the future. So that means that, so again, this is everything from students as partners through to student evaluations of teaching, through to being involved in governance models, through to just basic things like relational teaching. Because, I mean, often when we talk about student success, we are talking about institutional understandings of what success means in terms of passing and retention and grades and completions. So those are the things that we assume are important to students, but mostly they're important to us. Whereas again, if you actually do surveys of students and ask them to, you know, rank principles and those sorts of things, what they say is important; these are the evaluations that they use of the criteria they use to evaluate whether they are being successful at university or not and therefore whether they're going to be retained in university or not. They say things like, I want to feel like I'm learning things, particularly work-relevant things, I wanna make new friends and that's true for undergraduates, that's true for post-graduates, true for mature-age students. So it might be about professional networking but everyone wants the social aspect of that as one of the key success criteria. And I want to feel respected and accepted in classrooms. And if we can get those three down, then I think we are 90% of the way to solving the problem. And the fact that we haven't got there yet is still something we should as a sector be concerned about.

Prof Judyth Sachs So what's getting in the way? I mean, you know, you're both saying the same thing and it's been, this is nothing new. So what's stopping the ideas that you've expressed as you know that we have evidence works? Ryan, from Sydney University, that I know well, what's what's getting in the way at Sydney?

Prof Ryan Naylor Um, what's not getting in the way? Um, so I think the reason that this is a wicked problem is because there are so many small things that add up to make big things. So as I said before, our expectations around what the academic workforce looks like and whether they have

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education credentials and engage in CPD. That's one aspect. I think the fact that, you know, we have lots of Vice Chancellors and Deans who are very well intentioned. But then when the rubber hits the road, they will say, all right, we need this for new buildings, this for research funding this to attract elite researchers from overseas. And we've got four cents left over. So you can do a tiny amount of learning and teaching grants this year. I genuinely don't understand why the silo problem is so persistent. I mean, obviously all universities, even the relatively small ones, are still big institutions and so it is difficult to create personal relationships outside of your immediate area. But there are so many well-intentioned people and so many skilled people who all agree, and yet somehow can't meet up or, you know, get those working relationships and get integrated. I just, that's the one that I find really mystifying as why it continues to be such a pernicious problem.

Prof Judyth Sachs Sally, I can see that you're dying to say some things.

Prof Sally Kift Oops, sorry, I'm not sure I think, no, no. So, I was just, I am absolutely agreeing with everything. I was over at the South Australia Northern Territory Promoting Excellence Initiative Network, a Australian Awards for University Teaching award ceremony in Adelaide last week. And we had a bit of a panel chat about learning and teaching. I mean, this does all come back to valuing learning and teaching. And we went through some salad days back in the day when we had bipartisan support with a with what was CARIC, and it was something even before then, and then the Office for Learning and Teaching, the Australian Learning and Teaching Council, I got them around the wrong way, and then that was all shut down in 2016. But I reckon our best argument, and I've just been talking to someone about this recently, we need to get the Productivity Commissioner back in on this. I put the link in the chat to off the back of their big recent report. They've ... She's done a fact sheet and, well, they've done a fact sheet, and she's, and Commissioner Wood has spoken about it at length at a range of venues. And she's quoted in the Accord, so it's been called out, I think that's one of the first things, she calls it, it was quoted in the Accord where they talk about patchy teaching quality and the Productivity Commissioner's reference to laggards in the sector who need to be incentivised to improve teaching quality and the fact sheet sort of takes it seriously. So Commissioner Wood calls on TEQSA, our regulator, and the federal government, and any or all of these would be great, to address the lack of direct incentive for teachers in universities to

improve teaching quality. Now I know that won't play well, potentially, in the public sphere. But internally, it is such a big issue because I think it's all been relegated and there's a range of reasons it's not just it's easy to blame the teaching research research divide because it is such a big issue, but there's funding and and precarity and and so much change and COVID just left and then genAI hit and the teaching workforce is is exhausted and don't have good models because we don't a curated body of knowledge any longer with it with the lack of an Office for Learning and Teaching. But professionalising the teaching role would encourage universities to take this seriously. So now I know that some university management won't agree with this, but elevating the status of teaching by introducing incentives and the teaching awards and potentially teaching funding based on or some tying to teaching performance, which we don't have, which was promised at one point. But the Productivity Commissioner also specifically mentions offering grants for teaching-focused research. So we do some R&D into L&T. That would be a nice idea. And that they make lectures and course material available publicly, which might be part of the social alliance licence. And they recommend, I'm sorry, I am talking about she because that's who I've heard putting the view, that TEQSA should take some broad quality reviews on teaching practises. On a university-by-university level, so not constantly problematising the private providers and suggesting that everything we do over here in Learning and Teaching Land in university world is just fine. I can say this because I've got several affiliations, but I'm not in the sector any longer, so I don't get to not have a job. And they suggested that TEQSA develop a good practise note on quality teaching. I mean, there's an idea. There was a mistake made a little while ago when they were doing their practise note on equity and diversity, where they did actually mention universal design for learning in the beta version, but then, thank goodness, they took it out in the final version. So a practise note, perhaps that's a written practise note on learning and teaching. Perhaps we could put it in there. That would be an idea.

Prof Judyth Sachs Look, I'm going to let Sarah have the last word, but Alison Canty has asked, what do you mean by third space professionals?

Prof Sally Kift So very quickly, the boundary crossing professionals, I'll try and find the link and put it in the chat quickly, that particularly came to the fore over COVID. So particularly the blended learning advisors, but the third space

professionals that straddle the academic remit around learning and teaching and the professional remit of service provision.

Prof Judyth Sachs OK, thank you. Sarah, your observations.

Sarah Bendall Gosh, I mean again, just such a rich conversation and I think I've probably gained the benefit of this conversation I've learnt so much and completely agree with you know all these last comments that Sally and Ryan have made and I guess I would just add to that list of things we need to do better just to as I said before prioritise and respect the voice of students. We really need to ensure that. We understand what they need in learning and teaching, what they may need in student supports and actually take action on that. That would be my last comment, Judith.

Prof Judyth Sachs And can I thank the sort of the generosity of the chat that I've been reading, the generosity of the three speakers who've really been stretching some of our thinking, but providing solutions rather than constantly problematising rather than, you know, creating further barriers. I guess this will be a political project and given that we've got a new government, hopefully, this government may well reinstate or rethink the value of our teaching. I'm not that confident about that. But I think it's it is a time to be forward looking, imaginative. And somebody said about the pedagogy of kindness.

In fact, I think the pedagogy of kindness should be embedded in all of our interactions in any part of the university. And if we do that, particularly towards students towards students, students towards academics, academics towards professional staff, we'll have a much more the wellness of our environment will be much more conducive to supporting students to be successful. So thank you everyone for what I've found to be a really extraordinarily insightful, but also an exciting conversation this morning. And I hope that I get to meet you, Ryan, because, you know, I can actually see the University of Sydney from where I live. So let's hope that we can connect sometime. And Sarah, I hope that in Sydney, we might be able to catch up. And Sally, you and I catch up all the time. Thank you very much, everybody. And I'll see people in the future in our next Symposium. So keep safe. And just keep up the spirit of learning. Bye.