**APPG for Disability**

**Meeting Minutes**

9th July 2020

Lord Shinkwin: Yeah. Great. So good afternoon everyone and very welcome to all for to join the APPG on disability and looking at access to higher education. I am delighted to be standing in for Dr Lisa Cameron and who would otherwise be chairing this zoom call. A big thank you to Roberta for organizing us all and for getting an excellent line up of speakers. I am not going to speak very long, I am afraid I'm going to be working very much to a time line time as I have to join another call just after 5 to. So if our speakers could keep to time I would be very grateful and I should also mention closed captions are available and if anyone has any questions about that, if you wouldn't mind asking now before we kick off. Is everyone happy about accessing those who needs to? Okay, wonderful thank you. So, I am going to hand over to Justin Madders and I am delighted he can join us as Labour MP since March 2015 and importantly Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group. Justin not only grew up in his constituency but he became the first person in his family to go to university. Justin without further adieu my I hand over to you and after I will call on Dr Nasser to speak to us.

Justin: Thank you for asking me to speak today and give an overview of the challenges in terms of social mobility and I think really the starting point for anyone interested in it is the Social Mobility Commission State of the Nation Reports which really are a very good way of marking progress or lack of it and we know that the latest report social mobility is generally stagnating. People with disabilities are around three times less likely to be in the top jobs.

>> Can you slow down. You're going too fast

Justin: Sorry, it's just we don't have a lot of time.

>> It's too difficult, it's trying to process it. difficulty processing.

>> Okay thank you.

Justin: Well, so, those with disabilities from more privileged backgrounds are less likely to enter into professional occupations in comparison to those people from their groups, about 30% less. Of course we can't consider these issues without any regard to the current COVID crises, we believe government official believes the attainment gap could widen to 75% due to COVID when we consider it's already far too wide and is a massive concern because we have already got a troubling picture and only 57% eligible for free school meals and there are huge challenges facing the early years sector. Only 25% of children with special educational needs, and by the time children finish primary school only 51% of disadvantaged children reach the expected standard in reading and writing and maths and that's the gateway to higher education. We know there is been a huge increase in the number of children with educational and health care plans in recent years. But certainly we still see massive challenges with children actually getting those plans in the first place. Sometimes they can be waiting a number of years before a plan is even agreed and then once it's actually put in place there are often challenges with it being delivered in the way that it was originally intended and that's the consequence of the pressure school budgets have and one of the biggest challenges is the families having the determination to keep pushing because that's often the only way that these plans will end up being agreed in the first place. And it's a system that I think is far too cumbersome and slow and it's not user friendly for the people and there are many children out there not getting the right education and health care plan and the COVID situation shone a new spot light on that. Children with EHCPs have been given priority at the moment. But what we found is that certainly some schools have been conducting specific risk assessments and decided they can't accommodate them at all and that's going to be a massive issue moving forward. Although all children are returning to school in September we don't know whether there is going to be an element of social distancing required and that's one of the many concerns we have got in the current system that's going to take quite a few years to unwind and we'll talk about the news today about the decision to reduce the admissions target to university. Whether that's something you agree with, the challenge is can you do that without actually disadvantaging certain groups than they are already and that's a really tough question for the government to come up with an answer. Sorry I was a little bit quick at the start. I look forward to hearing the rest of the discussion.

Lord Shinkwin: Thank you very much for that very helpful overview. Like to call on David Blunkett, someone who needs no introduction as one of the UK's most distinguished servants, a former Secretary of State For education and Home Sector. We look forward very much to hearing what you have to say.

David: Thank you very much indeed. I am part of chairing the higher education, Independent Higher Education Commission on Access for Disabled People. Professor Philip Norton who is in the Lords but also is a fellow student at Sheffield University has been working with a panel taking evidence since last year and fortunately we were able to do so face‑to‑face before COVID‑19 ended up with a lockdown so we were able to take evidence from students and those are an interest in facilitating access for people with disabilities to university in its widest sense including mental health challenges and obvious ones is physical challenges and also to accommodation that students are renting and we came across horrendous examples of straightforward things that could have been put right where people were allocated accommodation that was totally unsuitable for someone in a wheelchair and that's the kinds of things that can be dealt with more easily than the much more fundamental attitudinal changes and the day‑to‑day access to materials and to the course curriculum itself. We found examples where lecturers were very reluctant to undertake what is called lecture capture. This will now have been overtaken by what has happened and changed that will be made in the fourth coming academic year in terms of lectures being delivered online even if hopefully seminars and tutorials can be delivered safely face‑to‑face and therefore there will be an improvement I think for many disabled people in terms of access to the actual presentations. For many however, the access to materials remains a challenge despite the massive change over the last 20 years in terms of the use of the internet, completely transformational compared with my days when I had to engage my fellow students with a reading cycle. My promise to them was I would let them know what the tutors told me about what was essential reading. So although I have come across with a blind student that it isn't possible to read the whole list and very many students don't read anything like the amount we used to read and that's one of the challenges more broadly. I just want to finish by saying there are going to be a range of recommendations in the report which I hope we'll be able to get out in September which I hope will build on what is already happening because there is been substantial change and a greater degree of awareness but there is an enormous amount to be done. Some of it is simple like health and care plans which could be carried easily into higher education including the right to access the Disability Students Allowance in a way that provides the equipment and the back up and support that people need quickly easily and not halfway through the first semester. So a lot of these matters are about applying common sense, about changing attitudes, and those mind forged obstacles, I think it was mind forged mantles that was referred to and those changes we can bring about over time but in the mean time we can set the sail and on the back of COVID and the real obstacles it will take creativity and imagination and it's going to be a challenge. And I think we also need to get across that many disabled people who are capable of taking higher education would find it extremely difficult to access apprenticeships and vocational training. So I thought myself in further education before returning to HE. Amazing just how much people are very keen that other people's children shouldn't go to university equally keen that their own should. Thank you very much Kevin.

Kevin: Thank you very much David and if I may call on Dr Nasser and I know Dr Nasser through hearing of the excellent work with companies like enterprise holdings, where he provides disability management and assistive technology in both the work place and educational facilities, working towards an inclusive society and offering support throughout a person's life span. So Dr Nasser if you would like to say a few words. Thank you.

Nasser: Thank you Lord Shinkwin and thank you for the invitation. Right now in universities somewhere like a 13 to 15% of students declare disability and that's probably lower than the true number of students that don't get to university and if you look at the population as a whole one in five of the students can be considered as having learning disabilities like dyslexia and autism and these people are very capable but only don't make it to the next stage and there will be challenges for them and I think going to university would be very appealing to them. So this actual effort by universities to widen the participation should really look at attracting that talent. The Disabled Students Allowance as was mentioned and during his time it was one of the best schemes introduced to the educational system has helped hundreds of thousands and people and that's done with assistive technology and we need to go back to schools and especially at the transition point and help those students struggling and under achieving and make it know that higher education is not out of their reach and by helping them and also DSA could be extended to that level where people could help them come in but what is more important universities must do a lot more than just the SA. They have to work on the accessibility which this year demonstrated a lot of the students would be left behind if they don't have the correct accessible material. So university know it has to be done and this is the time they have to invest in it and they are going to have hundreds of thousands of students wanted to learn remotely without the accessibility practice they are not going to be able to do. So what is important is the transition point. From that employment and the uncertainty for the employment is also for the graduates and it's a very difficult mountain to climb for them unless they have the transitioning support dovetailing the access to work into the DSA would be a very good thing to do. So if you don't get that extra support we're going to have an army of population never getting access to employment again. So certainly the tools and the techniques and support is established and it works and has helped hundreds thousands of students to achieve their dreams thank you very much.

Lord Shinkwin: Thank you very much. If I could now call on James as Executive Affairs Manager at the Russel Group and Cat who is one of the primary authors of the Russel Groups later access reports, Pathways for Potential. Thank you very much.

James: Thank you very much and thanks for having us to speak a bit about the report. I thought I would offer a quick introduction about the Russel Group and hand over to Cat, the real expert on this area. But I thought it might be good to set the scene as to we're working on this and who we are. So we represent 24 universities and we're based in every region and nation of the UK and working together we're able to take action on areas of shared area. So they all great universities we represent but there are lots of great universities in the country and FE and the vocational reach really good. So our universities work together because there are some key areas where they think their collective endeavour strengthens. So as a HQ the Russel Group provides so that's everything from HE to immigration, Brexit and international partnerships and green issues and widens participation to HE. So many areas our universities will take individual stances or work with a wider sector but on key areas like this we have a shared voice even in the individual universities are different to each other. So their stories will be different too and that's reflected in the report as well. So we're really grateful for the invitation to speak to you all and we're keen to engage with the APPG and its members on this and any of those other issues I have raised as well. Before I hand over to Kat I know she won't mind me saying that but the report isn't a pat on the back. We're really conscious often organisations put out a report and the sub text is leave us alone and job done. This is for us the beginning of a conversations and sets out really big challenges for us and the wider sector and a big challenge for government and regulators and it does show progress and progress that we're proud of but there is much more to do. So because of its, the broad nature of the report disability is just one of the strands it touches on but I hope it can be a useful start to that conversation and as a personal reflection on this too, both Cat and I came from professional backgrounds where we have worked around disability rights, I have noticed that too that my background was more on international development and Cat is more domestically. So I will talk about students with disabilities and Cat will talk about disabled students, so you will have to forgive us if we end up falling into that debate on terminology but the reason within the group we have worked with the 24 measures to discuss these issues too and it's worth saying this report was written for the pandemic, all the work that universities will be doing about a return for students and for disabled students as well is something, we won't be able to give firm answers on that because there is so much we're working on but anything we take on board we'll happily come back to you. So we're keen to build on the report and the group, we look to you for your support but also your scrutiny and your input.

Lord Shinkwin: Thank you very much James. Cat. Thank you.

Cat: Thank you James and thank you for this opportunity. As James has said I recently coauthored a report called Pathways to Potential and this sets out our commitment to improve access to universities and we know we have a real way to go to improve access for all under represented students including disabled students. So 14 university set specific targets for students with disabilities and where targets have not been set this is often because gaps and outcomes for students with disabilities have already been eliminated. We have the Cardiff University Discovery Program which works to boost academic performance and improve social skills and encourage progress to higher education. 80% went on to higher education and also the Discover UCL Summer School which aims to equip hard of hearing and deaf students and 27% of those students went on to higher education which compares to the national figures for progression rates for students with a hearing impairment. Although we recognise the rate is still too slow, collaborating with group institutions and within their regions and to ensure that their initiatives are codesigned and developed with students from those backgrounds and parents and teachers and for this agenda to be accountable at a senior level. We have made some recommendations to the FRS to ensure the right regulations are in place and we're keen to ensure the right data is available to universities so they are able to make the right decisions on application. However the main recommendation was for government to implement a national strategy to improve access to higher education and linking universities to schools and employers to create a pathway to university from early years onwards. We believe this approach would work for disabled students in particular as the number are increasing they still remain unrepresented and there is a key role for government in particular in reforming send funding in school and amending regulations to remove barriers to disabled school access and a national strategy would examine these barriers and seek to remove them. With the pandemic impacting both the education and economy access and outreach work has never been more important because the recovery benefits from a strong knowledge economy. Our universities been working really hard by working online and they are also supporting students with mental health by adapting support service staff expertise and moving support online. We believe a commitment to a national strategy would foster opportunities across lab ration. So ensure the barriers to access in society are removed.

Lord Shinkwin: Thank you very much and not least in helping us get back on track in terms of time. I am delighted to have Phen, a former student and political strategy officer and he is a member of the senior research team at Disabled Students UK. You will be reading a statement from the founder of Disabled Students UK, thank you very much.

Phen: Thank you very much. Good afternoon, my name is Phen and I am here today to represent Disabled Students UK, we're a network from over 30 different UK universities, our work includes providing peer support and carrying out research on accessibility and we also recently published a report about the impact of the pandemic on disabled students. The structural issues that affect disabled students are not new, the pandemic have thrown them into focus and one of the biggest barriers is the process of acquiring adjustments. The process of securing them usually involves severe delays with an arduous administrative burden on the students and universities transitions to distance learning several months ago yet many of the members have no reasonable adjustments in place. It is often this process which leads to students being denied support. We're convinced this issue plays a huge role in the non continuation and attainment gaps. In recently years some students started investigating and raising these issues themselves. Reports showed it's not unheard of for students to wait months to see the reasonable adjustments implemented and the university's response has been to avoid changes and the only remaining option available to students is to build a formal complaint. Unfortunately university complaints procedures are usually inaccessible to disabled students and the office for independent adjudicator will not look at these complaints. So what can be done to protect the rights of disabled students. Currently the enforcement falls under the office for students. The OFS needs to create concrete structures for these enforcement and the use of sections where universities remain noncompliant. If the OFS is unable to do that we need to see the creation of a separate body task with this role. We have only had time to address one of several issues but we wanted to give you the opportunity to read more about the scope of the problem therefore we'll distribute the full report to the office of the Chair. We look forward to working together with all of you to provide a student voice to help develop these issues. Thank you very much.

Lord Shinkwin: Thank you very much. If I may exercise the Chair's prerogative and begin the Q&A session by first of all thanking all of our speakers and it's been extremely interesting and I know there is been a lot of comment on the chat function, I will ask the first question which is and directed to Phen but other speakers have the right to come in and I appreciate that no legal action is easy but are you aware of there having been any consideration given to a test case on the issue of the very important point you made about the anticipatory nature of the duty to make reasonable adjustments and I direct that as you Phen thank you.

 Phen: There is something that we are watching for. Unfortunately a lot of disabled students also fall into the categories of being financially less well off compared to their peers. This is definitely something that we are looking for and are very determined to help support when we find someone who is willing to go that route. Unfortunately most of the people so far that have come to us have been people who have been so disabled by the universities practices that they are simply too exhausted, financially and mentally to consider a lengthy fight like that. But yeah, that's definitely something we are looking for.

Lord Shinkwin: Okay. Thank you very much and may I just ask ‑‑‑

Phen: Can I just expand on that. ALFE, the alliance for inclusive education. It's an organisation that promotes campaigns for disabled people and students rights to education. So we cover higher further education and children's education. We're very interested in looking at this around online learning, because we think there mate be a case to be answered for particularly around school education and the applications of the public sector website regulations and as you say the Equality Act anticipatory duties and not only around accessibility of online learning and if you are unable to access the curriculum, online learning curriculum that there is an alternative provided for disabled people and students. So we're very interested in looking at this particularly from a remote education remit given it's very topical at the moment.

Lord Shinkwin: Thank you very much and can I open up the Q&A session to any questions from the virtual floor as it were. Does anyone have any burning questions in response to what we have heard from our speakers.

>> Will it be okay if I ask a question?

Lord Shinkwin: Yes of course.

>> I am the Disabled Students Union Officer and I am aware of the issues going to be arising that was touched upon about the DSA and streamlining process because I know myself and many of my peers applied for the DSA in July and didn't receive our equipment until about mid October. And in light of the importance of technology and the coming year if the COVID crises it's going to be incredibly important that disabled students have access to the technology to complete the degree and if we don't have that sorted out we may see a massive spike in dropouts in disabled students and I spoke around and I think an important consideration will be to reinstate, at least on a temporary base, the ability to purchase technology or equipment before the process has been completed by the DSA and reclaiming its funds back after. So that by the beginning of the degree, they have everything that they need to successfully complete the degree in a remote nature.

Lord Shinkwin: Thank you very much and may I ask if you are happy to share what your reading and where?

>> I am studying law, I am doing a qualifying law degree.

Lord Shinkwin: Fantastic. Are you enjoying it?

>> I am loving it. I have got just terrific news about my results.

Lord Shinkwin: Is there anyone else with a question? I think Simon wanted to say a few words. Thank you very much Simon. Please do go ahead.

Simon: Thank you very much, I am a professor in criminology in London but I wanted to bring to life some of the issues which we have just been discussing in relation to my nephew, also studying law and he is registered blind and he has autism, so complex needs and I think his experience in the University of Glasgow has been beyond anything I thought was even possible in the UK in the 21st century. Just about everything bad that you can imagine has occurred to this particular student. There is been almost a complete failure to provide for him with regard to reasonable adjustments, many of which were either not provided, poorly provided or given to him off the peg and therefore not suitable or were simply taken away. And an enormous inability to provide him with digitalized reading and sometimes taking between six and nine months to digital eyes a single book. I think in his first year he was only given one text out of 600 on his reading list. In year two, four out of five hundred. So he sat all of his first and second year exams based on his memory. There was refusal to give him targeted reading and IT failures and he has not had access to IT for a total of 42 over a five year degree. IT was not prepared for his exams, he was never given toilet or screen breaks to medicate his eyes, in five years he was never taken to a single social event by the university. When they invited him to, Gary collected a number of leaflets from the solicitors who were hosting stalls and he asked them to be digitalized and the university refused to do it and they refused to give him back his own leaflets and we had to do a data protection act request to get them back. We took the university to mediation using solicitors in Edinburgh and the university walked off and we did data protection a act requests, they have criticised him for doing disabled and not being able to walk downstairs, we have raised 31 formal complaints, 21 with the ombudsman and bear in mind the office of the student doesn't exist in Scotland and for an ordinary students with challenges you maybe expect 20 communications per year, Gary at 70 per week, we have registered 9,400 letters between the university and this student and of course when you raise complaints it brings staff retaliation and we have had bullying and discrimination and all of this due to a lack of care and interest and a lack of training amongst the staff and micro bullying and a level of impact which has just been overwhelm and the entire family are under medical supervision as a results of this ongoing and it had a huge impact and last week everybody in his class graduated with the exception of him. And Gary is on the call with us and I would invite you to ask him how he felt about his experience.

Lord Shinkwin: Gary, thank you very much for joining us and Simon thank you very much for giving us such a detailed and dis‑spiriting background. Gary, would you like to tell us, to have one person of course which Simon mentioned to hear from your perspective how it's impacted on you and has your member of Parliament has been involved and helpful?

Gary: My university experience has just been absolutely awful, right from the get go, I have just had problem after problem to getting access to reading materials to allow me study the course so the exams not going properly and IT problems and the volume of communication, I had to switch from full time to parts time because of the difficulties with getting all of the accessibility arrangements working. We have had to go to mediation and we have had it go on the Victoria Derbyshire program. So it's been a really, really difficult experience and it's just completely awful. I cannot express how awful it's been, I haven't enjoyed the course at all. It's just been really, really awful and we have been trying very hard to get the university to fix it and at every turn it's not produced any outcome. It's not helped, it's not improved the situation, some of the things they have helped slightly that you they then say we have done this and we don't really need to do any more. It's been a really fight and there is just no end in sight it seems.

 Lord Shinkwin: Thank you so much Gary and I am so sorry to hear all of the difficulties that you have faced and are facing. It's amazing that you are persevering and I hope you can complete your degree successfully. Given the restrictions on time I hope you will forgive me if I ask if maybe we could liaise off line after that call and if you could raise with Roberta and hopefully we can arrange a time to talk. But thank you very much for joining us. May I invite any other questions and I do apologise, people have been putting their name up on chat, I am afraid I haven't been able to catch people's names but Roberta, I don't know if you say a few names of people.

Roberta: I believe Jess O'Brien had a question.

Jess: So I have had a number of concerns raised with me by disabled post graduates students at my university, University of Cambridge where I have finished my term as the Disabled Students Officer, there are a lot of post grad students relying on UK funding to be able to access postgraduate education, particularly students whose impairments limit the number of hours they are able to work in a given time frame. Firstly I have had issues raised regarding prorated maintenance for those studying part time due to disability. The funds are inadequate leading to financial disadvantage and secondly particularly in the current crises UK RI funding extensions should cover all students rather than just final year students. Disabled students will be as a disadvantage trying to catch up on months of work. I wonder how the panel believes we should tackle this and if there is any policy around the UK RI and how they react to this particularly disabled students?

Lord Shinkwin: Is there anyone who would like to come in on that? Maybe James or Cat, I wonder do you have a view on that particular issue.

James: I was just going to say, I typed something quickly in the chat because I am conscious people are probably keener to air their views rather than listen to me speak more but what I wanted to say is, that the Russel Group can't really speak for individual universities but I wanted to say, rest assured we're taking notes and I will make sure that omitting names we'll go back to the members and make sure it's raised and the report covers a whole range of issues and disability is just one strand of that but I will make sure we feed into it and longer term might be honing in on tissue areas.

Cat: I think the point around disabled students is really important and a new strand of work we will be looking at access to post graduated study and experience of disadvantage students in postgraduate education and this issue around UK RI fund something one that's new to me and I would be really interested in taking the conversation off line because it sounds like an area that's been potentially overlooked. So very happy to talk to you and I would love that have that conversation.

>> Can I just say one of the issues is around the disabled students allowance and the £200 that students are expected to contribute toward their computers, so I wonder whether there is an issue there and a quick win to gain on that one. If more remote learning is being done at home then disabled people are being pushed into accessing their computer kit at home unlike they are at in the college or university, then they would be able to access the computer kit with assistive technology et cetera.

Lord Shinkwin: Thank you very much Simone. I know that is an issue and the All Party Parliamentary Group on assistive technology is pursuing with the DFE at the moment. So maybe you and had can have a chat over this meeting or by email about that.

>> That would be nice to bring that in with the Disabled Students UK as well. It would be good.

>> Yeah.

>> Is that all right. It affects them as well.

>> I know there is at least two people on that call who can provide data on the numbers of disabled students who do not go ahead with their DSA provision, we can't say it's because of the £200 but is there a greater barrier that you could put in place than the £200, I don't think so. So approximately, a third of disabled students that get this allowance don't complete on their equipment which means they are not getting their reasonable adjustments. I am not sure it's a hundred percent legal in line with the Equality Act. The Equality Act doesn't say it should be related to how much money somebody has. And I think Battod is taking something along these lines but they are struggling with finding an individual student who can take a case against the government.

>> You can send us over the link in the report.

>> Yeah, this data is internal data, I can see Nasser on this call.

>> These are evidence, all the providers to the sector collected and it does show real trend that a significant number of students won't take up the equipment because of that £200 which is a waste of taxpayers money. So if this student doesn't get the support they will either under achieve or drop out. So you knowing economically it was a wise decision and we have tried to undo it but seems to be a process nobody is will to go take up in the DFE.

>> We're happy to share our data. I will pop the email in the chat so you have my email.

Lord Shinkwin: Thank you very much David. As I mentioned early, I am going to have to leave the call at this stage. So join another call but I just wanted to thank everyone for coming on the call, I know that as I say, there is been very full conversation via chat which I am sure will be captured by Roberta. So thank you very much again Roberta for organizing this and I look forward to liaising with Roberta to how best we can follow up with the issues you have raised, we will be considering how do we push them, in particular the last point I will be going back to the APPG on assistive technology and raising that again through them. But thank you very much and I hope you will forgive me if I leave you in the hands of Roberta. Thank you to all our speakers.

Roberta: I think we'll just have one final question, if that's okay. There is been a lot of questions about technology, and I was wondering if you could maybe elaborate about what more you think we can be doing in terms of getting disabled students access to their assistive technology.

Nasser: Of course, one of the greatest opportunities is the fact that everybody is having to use the platforms like zoom and it brings about things like the captioning and captioning is is vital. We need text for students if you make it built in the infrastructure rather than an add on, everyone benefits from it and the cost is negligible. So one of the things universities should be able to do is give access to what is available in everyday devices and open systems try to raise awareness of what they can do in order to get by but the DSA process take several months and you have to have assessments after assessments and most students when they find, they are totally overwhelmed by the experience of going to university they give up so making these available before they go to university, even at FE or six form schools, if you make it available to them the cost of managing them at university is going to be lower and assistive technology is available and it's raising the awareness and the other important point about accessibility, it is really doable. Lecturers need to change their attitude, they have done it over night but they still need to do more, they need to look at what makes something more engaging, so technology is there and it's much better than when I started 30 years ago and it's also very cheap and everyone can see the prices of the technologies more or less dropped to zero and you can have it built into your everyday device. So more awareness is one and culture and attitude changes.

>> I am an occupational therapist and I happened to have worked in three universities and I deal with technology a great deal. I think everybody on this program today thank you for it, should appreciate that universities respond to funding and one of the problems I believe for students with disabilities, it's like a lot of things in live at the moment. There are too many of you trying to help these students and not all your opinions are actually in agreement. And it would be much better if you did what some other groups have done and linked together more closely in your organisations because I think universities can play off against each other and they then don't help the students because they are having a funny game with you lot and not helping the student and I think if the money depending on making the student be able to do these things so we need to persuade the government to add a huge some of money so they gain from it.

>> Universities manage several hundreds of millions of pounds of budget. The cost of looking after disabled students doesn't probably come to a couple of million pounds and if at least 10% leaving university without completing the coarse, the cost to the university is multiple to what they could have spent for keeping them there. So the economic argument is retain the student and don't lose them and let them achieve because they are responsibility is about getting them employable and if they don't become employed then universities won't be attractive for other students, so the economic argument is to put the priorities right. They were talking about pennies that we don't have yet they are wasting the pounds but not doing the right thing.

>> Currently the national health service spends millions on compensation cases and I think universities can be doing the same but we have to be positive.

>> Sorry. Can I come in on this very point. I am one of the leaders from Disabled Students UK, I have first hand experience of my university executive just straight up refusing to motorize the doors of our main building. They have known for years that it's a problem and their answer has been to our disabled students officer, we haven't got the money. They find plenty of money to do other things but the truth, I do not buy the case that this is a, the universities will come around and do what they can if they get the right things because Gary's case demonstrated that universities will fight tooth and nail to not do things. And I think it's possibly very, I say this with a great deal of respect. I think it's possibly a counter productive attitude to that I can that we can trust university executives to take the steps when they have the money to do so because they have the money to do so.

>> I would just back that comment because employers, want to treat disability as a legal compliance or they do it because it makes a lot of sense, it's a good business decision. Universities with make fundamental differences and it won't cost them a lot of money but it will help retention and attainment. This is very important, universities have to be attractive to everyone and if you don't demonstrate you are value for money you will loose them and the message after the COVID what do you do with the students have haven't had the correct delivery of the content. They need to address this issue and investing in that infrastructure will save them money in the long term and we don't have an option to leave students to fight for themselves and unemployment will be so high and so many students will never get a chance on the employment ladder.

>> I wonder if I could just pop back in.

Roberta: Just very quickly because we need to wrap up.

>> The comments were great and the executives don't care, we wrote to the principle and he didn't even reply. I flew to Scotland to meet with the rector, no interest and no action. With IT there is a lack of knowledge around procurement and very small lists of assistive technology and the ordinary IT services are not familiar and there is a great organise called sight and sound but the number of suppliers naturally is really very small and not big enough to address these issues, all good points thank you.

>> The suppliers are there, there needs to be somebody demanding service and that's the problem.

>> I think knowledge and skill is it. It's not even money, one key thing is, ring fence the money. So it has to be spent. Whenever the money is in a big pot they don't have the money but one of the successes of the DSA is this is money just for disabled students and around that is the knowledge and skill that's built up and that's missing and universities taking more responsibility to develop that knowledge and skill is fundamental to getting this right I feel and there is already a decent foundation relative to other country but there is so much more to do.

>> One of the biggest barriers is disabled students not being consulted enough when policies are being designed. There is a lack of consultation with the very people these services are designed for.

>> Very true Adam. I have just been sitting here listening to all of that and I am a disabled student and I felt like we're just being talked at a lot of the time and I know people are trying do a lot of good for us but we're not consulted, we're not included and that's part of the problem. It's part of the bigger problem.

>> Totally agree with that and I think its really essential to highlight the university's lack of engagement in adjustments, our university, we campaigned really hard for the university to start making communication using accessible. So that our visually impaired students could access the content and they responded in writing telling us it's not on brand for the university and that's not something that's a financial cost. So I agree with all the points made about the financial adjustments that need to be made and the access to funding but there is a huge attitude adjustment that needs to be made.

>> Nobody is talking about the website, public sector website regulations, I have been reading a lot about this and because it's all quite new to me and I haven't done anything about remote learning and it seems nobody is talking about the use of them, are universities using them. Does disabled students know about them. Is anybody testing that these are appropriate for disabled students and there is a bigger debate and how much is compliant with the regulations.

>> Can I just say, I work at a university and I am visually impaired and I have been a part time student and I have a lot of lived experience of this but as a member of staff we have been talking about getting access to facilities, the websites, I am working at home because of COVID and university, I find the senior management where you work have been very supportive, often it's individuals but even so just getting everybody to buy in to the whole thing about disability, whatever the disability is. A lot of the time people are just too busy and something else comes along and they are driven by a target to reach and it's just one more thing to worry about. I am on the Equality and Diversity and Inclusive Council at the university and it's not my main day job but there is a lot of things students struggle to get into university and students have struggles to stay at university because I know several blind students who left because it was just too hard. I know about using assistive technology, I have just put a comment on I know sometimes more because I use people like sight and sound, I sometimes get asked for advice rather than the IT people and then there is the simple one, there is just, it's just too much for them and staff sometimes just don't want to be worried. I get involved in where students go to after they finish. And some of the most qualified people finish university, they stay and do right through to PhD because they can't get a job outside and that's a big challenge and having staff that are role models with a disability I am asking a global leadership team to disclose if they have disability so students can see they are not just wanted for their money but wanted as members of staff who universities will pay for.

Roberta: Thank you very much we do have to wrap up. I have made a note of every comment in the chat and my email address is also in the chat. So we do want your comments and we welcome them and we will update you but we do have to close. Thank you very much for all your comments, I will send out all the information that's been in the chat, I have made a note of everything, I am really happy we have been joined by so many people in the sector and students so we can hear first hand of all your experiences. There are plenty of questions haven't been answered. So feel free to send them to me. So but thank you very much for joining us. We're 14 minutes over time but this meeting is going to be drawn to a close.