

# APODE Webinar: Equity and Inclusion in Flexible Learning Challenges across the sectors

Panel discussion on 4 November 2021 as part of APODE Week, organised by FLANZ with Claire Amos (Albany Senior High School), Steve Leichtweis (University of Auckland), and Stephen Marshall (Victoria University of Wellington)

[Recording](#)

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:00:05] A very good afternoon everyone. It's very good to see so many people here today, 30 on the list at the moment and I think will be - it will be more people joining it and I'm going - I will be the moderator for the panel discussion today. I'm a Senior Lecturer at AUT. And yes, welcome to Auckland, day how many - day 80 lockdown. So it's great to see our panellists are all here: Claire, Steve, and Stephen. And I will ask them to introduce themselves in a minute. But before that, as you can see, this session will be recorded. So if you would like to turn off your camera, feel free to do so. And we do have live transcription if you want to have live transcription on this, well. But as Kristina mentioned just now, this transcription will be reviewed before - when it goes public. So without further ado, let's introduce our panellists today. So Claire, would you like to introduce yourself and say a few words?

**Claire Amos** [00:01:12] Kia ora. Ko Claire Amos toku ignoa. I am the Tumuaki or Principal at Albany Senior High School. And whilst I do come from that sort of within the school leadership role perspective, I've also had a wide range of roles sitting on things like the Education Council. I sit on the board for NetSafe, work with the Advisory Group for Network for Learning, and I've sort of had a long history of enjoying sort of national and local technology and educational leadership roles.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:01:42] Thank you, Claire. Thank you for being here, and we look forward to hearing more for your sharing from the school sector. Steve?

**Steve Leichtweis** [00:01:53] Kia ora everyone. My name is Steve Leichtweis, I'm from the University of Auckland. I work in Ranga Auaha Ako, which is our central Learning and Teaching Design unit, which is out of the Provost's office at the university. I have been in this role for about five years, but I've been in Auckland for about eight and before that University of Waikato and Sydney and a couple of other universities before that. So I've been in higher education for a while and been doing this role for quite a long time as well, and have really enjoyed the opportunities that the COVID lockdown has presented to Auckland and what that represents as change as we look forward as an institution.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:02:45] Yes. Hi Steve, thanks for being here, too. And lastly, my former colleague, Stephen.

**Stephen Marshall** [00:02:52] Hi everyone. Hi, I'm Professor Steven Marshall and the Director for the Centre for Academic Development at Victoria University of Wellington, and Wellington is underlined in big and bold if you ask my VC. And I've been here for a very long time. I've also been past president of the Australasian Council of Open Distance and eLearning, so very actively engaged across the sector in terms of the long term shape of higher education and the role that technology plays through a whole variety of different pieces of work over the last couple of decades. So, yeah, looking forward to having the conversation with colleagues today, see a few faces, both from Victoria and from around the sector that I know well in the audience. Great to talk to you all.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:03:36] Thank you, Stephen and I, yes, I do miss Wellington [chuckle]. Welcome everyone to today's session: 'Equity and inclusion in flexible learning: Challenges across the sectors.' As you can see, Claire is representing school sectors and national local settings, Steve and Stephen, working at two different higher education institution and all have - both have international knowledge as well on this aspect. So to get us started on this one question, but for the audience, if you have questions or feedback, just feel free to put them in the chat or turn on your microphone and feel free to jump in. Otherwise, I would just keep going through the questions and the discussion points for today's session. So first of all, and see who would like to start first, Claire, Steve, or Stephen, in your opinion, how equitable and inclusive are our education sectors given your role within your context?

**Claire Amos** [00:04:40] I'm happy to kick off with the secondary context, and then we can work our way up. So I think the answer is not very. You know, we have a really wide and deep digital divide, which means that we have a really wide and deep divide when it comes to flexible learning and the access to it. My concern is that at present, the fate and the futures of our young people is in the hand of specific school leaders. And it really does rely on their personal depth of understanding of the issues and abilities, so co-design a localised solution to what is actually a really complex problem. And we've got a bit of an issue, I think, in the secondary space in that the Ministry of Education has had sitting in the background a digital strategy that set there and I've been involved in at different points in time. But it sort of languished a little bit in the background. And I'm really interested to see where in the national digital strategy that is being worked on at the moment where how that might refire up the focus on a specific Ministry of Education digital strategy that can support our schools. The role in lockdowns in Auckland really highlighted the vast continuum of our school leaders here and their understanding and their preparedness or lack of preparedness for delivering equitable, inclusive teaching and learning experiences online. And it's about understanding and experience that goes beyond just the provision of a device. You know, we had schools that did solve that part of the equation. But actually, if you don't understand how to design engaging and inclusive learning experiences that are informed by things like universal design for learning, nor do you understand how to balance the focus on the academics and sustaining the wellbeing of your students and staff, it can fall really flat. And what I think has happened is that people struggle to get it going in the first place, and they often did it in a way that was ineffective. And we saw that coming through in things like the data that came through in the OECD and the PISA reports around what effective teaching and learning looks like. You know, it's not that eLearning isn't effective. It's just that it isn't effective if you don't know how to do it effectively. You know, the tool is only part of the issue. And I think what happens when it isn't done effectively is that as soon as we come out of lockdown,

people default back to the status quo. And so whilst we have seen some real steps forward, and some real school communities that have leveraged this opportunity and done really well, we've also seen schools that have done it to a middling level and then have slipped back into very traditional modes and methods once they have had an opportunity, when they've gone back face to face.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:07:40] That's all right. The same point. Yeah, how how the digital technologies are being used and the change of behaviours is we're seeing a spectrum.

**Claire Amos** [00:07:49] So I want to emphasise that it's not just about the technologies and the tools of learning.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:07:55] But yeah, yeah, it's about the doing as opposed and the how people actually take it. There's a very interesting perspective and how about Stephen, who would like to jump in.

**Stephen Marshall** [00:08:05] Yeah. Maybe I'll jump in. I'm less confident that the digital strategy will help us because of my observations of how the sector is being shaped and framed and the priorities that the government, through its agencies, are choosing to privilege. And this is directly relevant to the sort of the equity and the inclusion debate because it's one of the things that I use in my own work is the sense of stakeholder salience and who it is that gets to define the parameters of how a system is operating. And it's abundantly clear that the ministries and the government have been captured by a very economically rationalist view of how they believe an education system should enact itself. And that's directly counter to genuine equity and inclusion because that privileges an economic system and it privileges measures of success that are themselves inherently unequal in their outcome. And until the government is prepared to recognise and work in partnership with a much wider range of people as key stakeholders and believes that education is something that exists throughout lives right from cradle to grave, they're going to pick winners and losers, and that inherently is an unequal situation. But I think also and this is sort of implied by the focus on things like devices and device strategies and the sustaining of what we do, it's really important, I think to position how we're talking about equity and inclusion from understanding basically what I call context and what process outcomes and feedback, so essentially you have to start by saying, well, who do we as educators believe our students are? Where do we see them and where? Where are they coming from? And also reversing that: what do they see of us? How do they see us? And how do they perceive us as being spaces that that welcome them and bring them in and have value to them and their lives? Then you think about what it is of the barriers to input. How how is it that people can enter into that space? And what is it that enables people to start to engage well and not to disengage at that point of entry? Then you can think about the experience of learning. What is it that happens during the time that you're engaged in learning? And hopefully that that isn't just a discontinuous process for you. Is that something that responds to who you are as a person and and helps you and challenges you to be more effective? Then do we get - do we see evidence of inequity of outcomes and recognising that in the university sector, we have to acknowledge that our goal is intellectual excellence. And so equity of outcomes is inherently somewhat challenging for us in terms of understanding what leads to that excellence in intellectual spaces. But it's pretty clear that we've got definitely some room to go, but we also need to think about the higher education space in

terms of that equity of outcomes more broadly than a single provider and a single model of what education might look at. So everyone always successful in every way for everybody and every system is unachievable, and we need to be pragmatic about that. And then finally, the feedback component is: how do we enable diverse people and other diverse viewpoints to be exercised and to have impact on the system, to exercise agency, to exercise ownership of its shaping into the future in ways that are productive and strengthen that wider sector, rather than dividing it and damaging its capacity to do really important things for the New Zealand society. So, yeah, a big, big, interesting hairy challenges for four for a country to grapple with.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:12:01] Yeah, I agree. I think the conception itself of equitable and inclusive is still waiting for more clearer definition, I suppose, let alone there are quite a lot of variables that Stephen has just mentioned. Steve.

**Steve Leichtweis** [00:12:16] Or leadership. I mean, we're still waiting for leadership in this space. So I'll take I completely agree with where Claire and Stephen have gone with their introductions and I'll add a maybe more of a practical or process approach from a univers... or an institutional perspective. So in a - in response to your initial question, as a large research intensive university that has historically prided itself as a campus based learning space or environment, we're about as equitable as we need to be or as inclusive as we need to be in our digital spaces. And to be blunt, like Claire was from the get go, that's not very much. And I guess the way to think about it from from the perspective, from coming from our perspective is that, you know, on a year to year basis, on a quarterly basis that senior level decision making folks within our university, they receive a lot of high priority requests and initiatives and programmes. And then they have to figure out how to spread very small amount of butter across a very large piece of toast. And so when there's no, when you're dealing with that kind of budget constraints, typically what happens is you assess the risks of not doing that initiative in this budget, this calendar year or this budget year. And things that don't have a sting in the tail like a punitive outcome for non-compliance tend to be pushed down the road, and we won't engage with them unless there is leadership at a more a higher level, which in our case is a New Zealand government, actually saying here is a negative or a punitive outcome if you don't engage and provide a much more equitable or inclusive learning space for all students. And you know, it's nice, I guess, even though it's a bit, it's slowly, slowly and kid gloves, TEC has released a new Disability Action Plan Requirement, where universities do have to have a very detailed action plan around disability, which covers equity and inclusion for the tertiary sector, and I think by 2024 there are going to be negative funding outcomes in higher education institutions that do not comply and have a very detailed disability action plan. And you know, we at Auckland, we do have a Office for the Provost of Equity, and they've spent the last few years developing a disability action plan and we've got a lot of work. That document is huge and it covers physical and digital learning spaces as well as our physical assets, the buildings that people access and the processes and strategies and policies that make that all work. It's a huge amount of work. And, you know, even the the news last week where the government set up the very first kind of office for equity. You know, there's opportunity for that to grow and actually get to the point where maybe New Zealand has legislation similar to what Australia has, similar to what America has with the ADA rules. And that's the kind of drivers you know, it's great to ask people to to make sure that you're providing an equitable space for all students. But unless you have the right incentives or legislation saying here is an out and negative outcome if you do not

provide this, many people will be in a very similar position to us where we can just say at the risk of not engaging is not high enough for us to actually take the time to really address the issue.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:16:27] Yeah, thank you, Steve. Yes, I think leadership plays a role in all the decision making or the impact on any strategy or policy or the ways we are going to do things. But on that note, and Steve, I think you mentioned a little bit in your greeting about the current global pandemic situation. So my next question is to what extent do you think did the global pandemic have an impact on equity and inclusion in flexible learning?

**Steve Leichtweis** [00:16:57] It did a brilliant job, but also did a horrible job. Obviously, from - as a university that has really been solidly marketing and pushing itself as a campus based experience, learning experience, the move to remote emergency learning and teaching was a wake up call for our teaching staff. But I think Claire was chatting even before we started the recording that, you know, the experiences of many staff who didn't have the the teaching presence or the practise in the digital space, their experience of remote emergency learning in an environment where we don't have the tools, they don't have the disposition, they don't have the comfort facilitating in digital learning spaces. That gives us a change management problem that where the staff will want to revert to what they know, the comfortable space where they've been habituating for, you know, how many decades. But at the same time, it's really highlighted some major risks for our institution if we don't up our game and with a new Vice Chancellor and a new Provost and even a new Chancellor, we have a really good opportunity, and we're in the midst of reimagining what Auckland is as we move forward in the learning and teaching space, and we're solidly putting our ring - hat in the ring for blended and online delivery. So to help subsidise what will become more of a sticky campus is what they're calling it and where if the students do choose to come on campus, they're coming on for high value, really active relational opportunities to learn with their peers and with the teachers who are part of that physical delivery of portions of the course.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:19:01] Yeah. How about you, Claire? Anything to add on based on what you have said yourself?

**Claire Amos** [00:19:06] Yeah, but building on the back of what Steve has said, I think what it actually did is it shone a light on the inequities and it actually at the pandemic has actually caused a chasm to widen and harden, and with each consecutive lockdown, we've seen it actually overflow into, you know, those students who were disengaged throughout their lockdowns were then disengaged often when they came back to school and we had increased absenteeism. We have schools and communities where they struggle to re-engage. We had incredibly high engagement over lockdown here at Albany Senior High School because we built like - flexible learning is in our DNA. So we just flicked a switch and we were fine. And we managed, for the most part to keep a really good connection and relationships and have very relationship focussed approach throughout lockdown. Our kids re-engaged immediately. Those students, those communities where the kids were disengaged, we had 80,000 households in New Zealand representing 100,000 students without access to a device, and we know that the device isn't the only thing that matters. But without a device, you can't do the other stuff. So when you've got that many young people without even the basics and having the option to be having access, and then we've got the issue of not having the Wi-Fi, having limited bandwidth, only having, you know, what's on

their cell phone able to access that. You can't do the hard work in terms of getting the other stuff right. And so it became a real postcode lottery. And I think that the pandemic served a really important, you know, it both shone a light, which was in some ways terrible as Steve said because it highlighted the haves and the have nots and the challenges that we have in our system. But I think it also did us a real favour because we can't shy away from the fact that these days there's this chasm, this divide exists in our society. And so, you know, I'm hoping that it results in us stepping up. And, you know, I agree with Stephen that, you know, I also don't have trust in the digital strategy [laughter] because I was involved. In 2013 and 2014 I was part of a team that put together the 'Future Focussed Learning and Connected Communities' paper. We put together a raft of recommendations for the government to implement that was designed to close the digital divide. Look at the teaching and learning, look at all the stuff that goes with it. And we had a change of government and it got thrown out. The baby got thrown out with the bathwater. And that's the real risk that we have. This stuff is too deeply politicised. We need this stuff. We need a strategy that rises above being a political volleyball. And I've been shocked as someone who is a, you know, I would pride myself on being a bit of a raving, lefty leaning educator, I have been shocked at how little this stuff has been prioritised and worked on in the last few years. You know, I would have thought if we do care about our people and we want to be kind and we want to make sure that everyone has what they need, actually, we need to get on and close this digital divide and do the work that then has to happen after after we've done that.

**Stephen Marshall** [00:22:44] Yeah. And I think that - I think I would say that it is equally viewed by both political parties and they're equally bad at how they view it. So I actually think if National had stayed in government, I'm not convinced that the outcome would have been any different, either. And the problem here is that the political perception of the higher education system in New Zealand is very much defined around the idea that it is a personal benefit and that this is something in which private incentives and business activity should dominate and the market will lead to the right outcome. And so I worry and I hear what Steve's saying and I'm thinking here, particularly in the context of the code of pastoral care, we have governments and we have agencies that are very comfortable with direct manipulation of the sector without carrying the cost and the responsibility and the accountability for what's achieved in that. So they are very happy to tell people what they should be doing. They're very unhappy to invest in the resources needed to enact that well. And that's a key difference between New Zealand as a country and even Australia, where several times they've had quite substantial agendas in the educational space and they directly invest additional money into that space, recognising that even if the business as usual state is what's being funded, there's always a cost of change. There's always a burden to take the sector through a change process. And if you don't pay for that, then unless you're very lucky and you've managed to get all the way through that change process because of a crisis like a pandemic, the natural behaviour is to retreat back to what happened before simply out of a resourcing problem. And that's a mental energy issue as much as it's actual resources, people on the ground systems, et cetera, et cetera. I mean, I think it's for me one of the great ironies in the spaces and setting aside clearly issues around digital divide and coming at this from a university perspective, COVID's great. COVID has done a number of things that are actually spectacularly good for access and equity for the people who are in the university system. It has - we get a lot of the feedback from our disabled students and from even our normal student body that there are many aspects of what's happened in the last couple of years, they very much like and they would very much like us to keep going.

Most of our disabled students are having a much better experience of our courses at the moment because they can be in an environment that is customised to their needs exactly. That's their home environment or where they might be and yet gain access equitably to exactly the same resources and experiences that every other student is giving. They are not being accommodated. They are having a mainstream experience. And for many of them, the tools that they use to do that are very well suited. And we don't have the ADA in New Zealand, but we buy U.S. Sourced materials and tools that are ADA compliant, so our toolset is great for those students, allowing for the fact that they have to have the necessary resources to be there in the first place. But interestingly, this is helping for those resources as well. I mean, Wellington has a hideously high cost of living. Accommodation costs are horrendous, transport costs are horrendous. So for our students, the opportunity to do their learning from another place where the cost of living is just cheaper, where they don't have to have the burden of spending hours in the day going through public transport, where they can transition quickly from learning activities to personal family care or caring responsibilities or work responsibilities without a high transition cost between that time in their day. Those are things that directly make things better for many of our students. That said, we've had real challenges with some groups and the problem with the device conversation, and we started asking this question a few years ago of our students and very quickly settled on a question that wasn't merely 'Did you have a device that you could use for your learning?' So we stop asking, 'Can you access the laptop?' because it turns out that the laptop you could access was your parents one, that was a work one that you couldn't use for anything. We started asking, 'Have you got a device that you can use for extended periods for your learning in an environment in which you can in fact undertake that learning?' because this is the thing that really starts to come home for some of the economically disadvantaged groups in New Zealand in that it's not you by yourself, it's you plus three or four other children, parents all trying to undertake learning activities in very cramped, compromised living environments. So and we even see this in the workplace with the number of us that are now used to doing video based meetings and conversations. But you have to be somewhere we can do that. I have the privilege of being in a private room by myself. I can talk as loudly and as actively as I want to as part of this conversation. I'm not disturbing other people and they're not disturbing you, but that's really not something generally available. So it's a much more complicated problem than simply technology. And it's also like everything, it's got good and bad to it. So, yeah, it is interesting in that respect. And of course, all of these issues predated the pandemic. It's just that the pandemic has removed some of the things that made it easier for us to pretend that they really weren't present in the space. It's made it much harder to deny this stuff. And also, of course, everybody has become less well. Everyone is subject to a lot of stress, either directly themselves or through people around them, and that's made them much more fragile and less capable of dealing with things not being exactly as they would want them to be. So that really is remains a significant problem for us, I think.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:29:07] Yeah. Thank you, Stephen. I'm conscious is halfway through the discussion, and I may want to give the audience a chance if you have any question or comment at this point. Because it has been quite quiet on the chat.

**Steve Leichtweis** [00:29:23] I will respond or add to Stephen's comments about how the pandemic has made things more equitable. But with a bit of a sarcastic tone because I think it's equally bad now for all of our students in the digital space, certainly.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:29:41] Yeah. And Sue, just make a comment on the chat. I wonder if Claire, Steve, or Stephen has anything to say about that.

**Stephen Marshall** [00:29:52] So I'm just about to drop a response quote into the chat. Here we go. And this is on the bottom of every single email that comes out from me. It's a reference to Michael Pollan, who makes a similar point. So and I do want to acknowledge that, but I think that we have to be uneasy in this space. So I think I want people to be concerned and engaged and uneasy because then we're going to try and find solutions. My my biggest - the diagnosis I have of the university system is it is complacent and arrogant and comfortable. And so I want us to be uneasy. I want us to be thinking about things that provoke us. But I think it's really important to think about it, particularly in a country as small as New Zealand. We shouldn't be solving these problems single provider by single provider. And if we're not prepared to think in that space, then the government will do ham fisted things like they've done with the polytechnic sector and simply shut down any capacity to discover new pathways by the sector and impose on it a rigid, hierarchical, very limited, scoped view of what it is that a tertiary education system does. And we're seeing similar behaviour with they're talking around and regulations around micro credentials. So they're framing micro credentials in a very, very narrow and quite limited way. And I'm sorry, I absolutely do not accept that people in NCQA or TEC or the Ministry of Education have any clue whatsoever of what we could do with a micro credential like thing in New Zealand society. They are not experts, they are not practitioners, they are based observers and consumers, and I'm angry at what they do in that space.

**Claire Amos** [00:31:44] And I wanted to add to that, and this is actually sort of I know you've actually got this sort of answers the question that I think you're going to ask us. But I want to build on that idea around the changes that do get prioritised often represent quite an interesting view of the concepts of what it means to be equitable, i.e. I think we have a really big ongoing challenge in New Zealand's education system. At the moment we're undertaking the NCEA change package, which is affecting the qualification framework in secondary schools. And we are undertaking an NZC, New Zealand Curriculum, review. In both cases is a really interesting idea that, and you touched on this earlier, Stephen, that equitable outcomes are achieved when everyone achieves the same in essence. So the way that they sort of try and move us towards equity is through narrowing and actually starting to prescribe the learning more and more. And I talk about, you know, the learning left to chance that I want significant learning left to chance. We've all got to do the exact same sort of powerful learning and that will make us all equal. And in fact, it actually flies in the face of concepts of universal design for learning and even the understanding that we're a bi-cultural society and actually different people need different things. They need to learn different things. And so I think on one hand, we have this argument going on in the background around canons of knowledge that a bizarrely traditional and narrow and the argument is that we must all sort of - it's a move towards producing this - like students becoming products with the same made up of the same components. They leave high school and you know, part of the argument, and I don't even know if this comes from universities, really, but part of the argument is that universities want to know that they can all write an essay, they can all do this and they can all do that. And it's like they take some of the basic concepts around literacy and numeracy, and they sort of they expand it out and out to sort of determine that we have a responsibility to produce quite a standard product from our high school system. And actually, that desire to move us towards a more prescribed curriculum flies in the face of our ability to provide

creative and responsive, flexible design like I love our current NCEA framework. I would love to add to it and have more subjects and more standards and a big buffet that our teachers can select from and can tailor personalised learning pathways for our young people. Yet now, just when we have the technologies to more easily design these permanent personalised pathways, they're pulling us back to fewer NCEA standards, narrower New Zealand Curriculum design, which seems to be spelling out to educators that actually we should - it should be more of a one size fits all model of high school. I don't understand it. I am so frustrated because...

**Stephen Marshall** [00:35:07] I mean, there's a thing in management, which is what's measured as managed. And what that basically says is if you put in place a system where you're measuring achieve outcomes or whatever, somebody will want to make sure that they get more of the ones that they like and less of the ones that don't like. The nasty twist to it, though, is that there seems to be a tension that says, yes, we've got more of the ones we liked, but some of them were less important than the others, so we'll just take away those less important ones. So we get more of the ones that we really like, and then we'll take away the ones we - that are nice and we really liked them, but there's some of them that we really, really like. So we'll only go for those ones and you just you're constantly etching away at the bottom and you're losing. Every time you do that, you're becoming less equitable, you're becoming very centre. There's a former director of NZQA, who came to one of these sector forums a while back. And honestly, he - his first speech to the sector about quality in higher education - tertiary education was that as a former CEO in the dairy industry, he knew how to make really high quality cheese, and that all of those that thinking about what it took to make high quality cheese could really just be applied really well to to the education system. Yeah, let's just say that the cheese metaphors dominated discussion for the next couple of days, and there's that. Unfortunately, that model is really inevitably.

**Claire Amos** [00:36:38] Problematic concept of what a good, equitable outcomes means, you know, and and if we hung up on, you know, the [inaudible], I remember getting I actually walked away from the discussion on Twitter because I made a comment I'm not a fan of event exams. I think they're partially problematic. You know, I think there are much better ways that you can assess young people in the context, in the flow and far more naturally occurring ways. But the argument of the other person on Twitter was that exams are the only equitable way to assist young people because, you know, they're all sitting in the same conditions. And it's just like, 'No, that's the opposite of equitable [laughter]' and that's what we're working with. We're working with "experts", determining that equitable is the same rather than equitable, actually being more diverse approaches to meet the needs of a greater number of people.

**Stephen Marshall** [00:37:35] Yeah, I've made myself extraordinarily unpopular in my university by raging a campaign against exams. But I'm interested to see that the Vice Vice-Chancellor Learning and Teaching at Waikato also raised this in a university wide paper, making exactly the same point. And if you simply take a step back and ask yourself, what is the purpose that we're trying to achieve as we educate people? And where are they going to enact learning? There are no exams in that space. Beyond that, there's no individual work in that space.

Steve Leichtweis [00:38:09] There's going to be a lot of resistance to, of course, any of that happening because, you know, exams are easy. They're easy from an academic's perspective when it comes to marking and save or...

**Claire Amos** [00:38:20] Scalable. They are scalable [laughter].

**Steve Leichtweis** [00:38:23] Yeah. Well, and it's scalable and cheap, and it means they can focus on their other job, which is research and other outcomes. And so when the students are screaming, that's the only time we change, make changes at a university level and the way we design and deliver. And if they're not screaming, which given the way that the process is set up, it doesn't, it's really difficult to create red flags within the way that we deliver from students. Where's the need to change? And therefore that resistance from our institution because they want easy, simple processes and from our own teaching staff is quite marked in the fact that they really resist this and they want to stick with exams.

**Stephen Marshall** [00:39:13] It's not just them, though. It's so this is the thing. That's the real problem. It's the parents, it's the students themselves. It's people in general because of this legacy of a belief that the large, consequential exam is how education enacts itself. And we seem to be incapable of engaging with that and explaining why we do assessment in the first place. I mean, most people are starting to discover that the university operated for many years without grades that in fact, it wasn't - the fact that we even give people grades isn't inherent to the concept of higher education. It was purely introduced as an attempt to help the system scale into its role as a skills certification process with a very manufacturing analogy aligned to that into the needs of the employers. And it's - it completely misses the point that in the modern world, we have moved our tools into a new space. Everybody collaborates to get work done. Everyone draws on the internet and on our ability to access and manage and critique and use information. I was talking to someone earlier today who was making the point that one of our main challenges in the integrity issue, which is what exams are typically designed to try and "solve" in quotes, is the fact that our students believe that learning consists of collecting content like it's six shells on the seashore and that the more you've got in your bucket, the more educated you are. And we have to be able to have a much more sophisticated conversation around the qualities of intellectually engaged, educated people in the future and their capacity to exercise agency. And then this is where equality really starts to come out. If we allow people to be themselves and to exercise themselves intellectually into a space as a peer, they can represent themselves and their communities and their cultures and their needs and perspectives far more effectively than a bureaucrat can do through some accountability instrument. And that's a real challenge, right?

**Claire Amos** [00:41:32] I've been fighting for years that we step away from this concept of formal assessment and actually that young people walk out of high schools with a portfolio that they can present however they like. And people sort of shove it because it's not divisible and measurable and, you know, you can't easily compare one to the other. And interesting, I wrote a piece last year, year before last before the pandemic for Ideologue: 'Imagining the education system five hundred years in the future'. And in that story, we went from our qualification framework to micro credentials to nano credentials, to the point where we realised that we didn't actually need to measure them at all because actually what mattered was the act of learning and that learning being based on needs and skills. And interestingly,

here at Albany Senior High School, we - every Wednesday is dedicated to impact projects because we don't formally assess and it is the best learning our young people participate in. They work with community groups, business groups to solve a real life problem, to collaborate, connect, and to enact. And we still have parents contacting us about it being the non-learning day because we don't assess, you know? Sort of like the act of some sort of formal assessment is the only way that people know that learning is taking place [laughter]. It's an extraordinary bind that we find ourselves in.

**Stephen Marshall** [00:42:56] So the other thing that sits on my emails is a link to my book, which I explored some of these ideas. There's a sociologist called Martin Trow, who worked on the 70s, who considered higher education and education systems generally is shifting between something that serves an elite audience, something that serves a mass audience that's very mainstream and then something that's universal in its experience. And one of the ideas I unpacked on that was this concept that the mass system, which is where New Zealand tertiary education very much is at the moment, is very much defined on its economic rationalities, on its impact into the economic functions of society because of the government's role as a funder of that and consequently the government's anxious responsibility to make sure that that public money is used well and effectively. But when you move into the universal space, the focus shifts much more to the experience of the individual and the value that they directly perceive themselves from having done this thing. So it - learning and particularly for adults in the universal spaces is a case of 'In my life, I would like to know more about this, or I would like to be able to do these things well, or I would like to engage with these communities of people in a discussion and an exploration of the space. And how can I do things that allow me to be myself well in those ways?' Now some of them will be job skills and that your employers says 'Great Stephen, you can now do that report so much better.' But others will be things that are much more about it in deconstruction. Now the interesting thing about those is that assessment on those is not about accountability to somebody else. It's a tool for stimulating you to to identify a strategy for improvement. A whole dynamic changes: agency sits with the learner, you don't have to worry about integrity issues because if you do that you're simply robbing yourself of something and you're the one that experiences that loss directly. Other people don't care because it's universal. Everybody's got it. So the fact that you've cheated to get something is pointless because you could have had it anyway. And I think to me, that's a real challenge for many societies as we start moving into this space because some of the systems that have operated for better or for worse, and the mass system really starts to break down badly, and there's been examples of that, for example, in the United States around the collapse of Apollo Education, the University of Phoenix Online and the way that that led to a collapse of the associates degree in the US as a qualification under a mass educational model simply because everybody had it. And the problem is that you can see and this is apparent in countries like South Korea where the market fractures down and it stops being less that people have degrees, for example, but which university they got their degree from, and then we start re-entrenching privilege and inequality simply because the things that matter in life are differentially available to different people and that often that knowledge is concealed from them. They don't - people don't have the social capital to realise that they're acting in a system with a dynamics of that system will never allow them to be successful. And this is something that Bourdieu, for example, talked about extensively. You have to be extraordinarily careful when you're trying to change a system to deal with issues of equality and inequality to recognise that the view of the world is very different from different places.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:46:35] Yeah. It's great to hear three panellists are linking global pandemic issues and challenges seamlessly, which is great. I don't have to ask the question, but and also now linked to the assessment topic, which is one of the biggest or hottest topics in education. So on that note, I think some of you have covered this a little bit already, but there's the one question in the chat about "Are creative approaches being explored towards inclusive and equitable approaches to assessing the achievement of learning outcomes?" What do you think since we have been talking about, you know, exam as formative assessment, summative assessment.

**Claire Amos** [00:47:17] [Inaudible] it has been and it's getting better and better. But my fear is that the changes that are coming with the NCEA change package are going to push us backwards because they and what's happened over time is there's been less and less - people are choosing to opt out of the exams because you can't design a completely internally assessed programme now with the current NCEA framework. And that has resulted in people being creative because we are starting to really understand the principles of Universal Design for Learning, and we are starting to understand what it looks like when people have portfolios of learning, used mixed methods and modes for evidencing their learning, like at Albany Senior High School, my - the line I drew on the same when I became principal here is that it had to be an absolute expectation that every assessment was designed to give students choice about context, where possible, a choice around the modes for which they were being assessed, and they had the power to negotiate how and when they were assessed and that upset the apple cart for a good year or so, but we're now finding our stride, but then comes along this NCEA change package where its saying it's a 50-50 split between external and internal assessment. And whilst it's not necessarily exams in the external, it is prescribed. It is going to be prescribed what that looks like to a far greater degree. So I think in terms of the secondary context, we have been seeing really creative shifts, but that has upset the apple cart with those who were always very traditional through very through - those who were winners in a far more traditional sector, getting nervous and actually pushing back. And I think that's why we saw high schools rushed back to reopen for exams, for instance, end our lockdown in Auckland because there was some very noisy, traditional voices that desperately wanted to get back to school because they are winners in the game of exams and they wanted to make sure those conditions were available to their young people. So we have made headway. I worry that whenever we do make headway that there are those in the system, they get nervous and pull us back a bit.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:49:27] Yeah.

**Steve Leichtweis** [00:49:27] We're certainly exploring what life might be like at Auckland University without exams or with less high stakes summative exams, but probably linking back to some of my previous comments. You know, there's a lot of stakeholders involved in that and those are internal, and that's the institution and the processes that are easy and simple, that kind of support that industry of assessment within the institution. We have the academic staff who are stakeholders who will resist because it's a change. It represents a change and that change requires time and effort on their part. And I think even before we started the recording, I was talking about, we have our external stakeholders like the Law Society, the Engineering Council and all of those kind of professional degrees where they're also, as Stephen said earlier, I think, wanting a way to differentiate and understand the

quality of a student based on what they - those students achieve through that exam process. And for them, that change would create quite a bit of trouble or problems for the way that they think about their profession.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:50:44] Yeah. Anything to add, and I see Stephen in the chat. Is that what you would like to say?

**Stephen Marshall** [00:50:50] Well, it's certainly a comment that has resonance with my academic colleagues. I mean, I think we've seen some really strong examples of this. We've seen when Melbourne - University of Melbourne tried to change its model of what an undergraduate degree experience would be, they were punished extensively by the market, by parents, by learners, by employers. And Monash University cleaned up by simply running a marketing campaign that basically said, 'Oh, Melbourne, that's a bit odd what they're doing over here. Come here. We'll do the nice, safe, traditional thing you know you want out of the university and there are no risks.' And that actually seriously worked as a strategy. So that's a worry. We've also seen and resonating with the winners under existing systems, really resisting change. We've seen this come from learners: if you change models of assessment, for example, with medical students, you will very rapidly get quite an aggressive pushback from students who, and we see this with law students as well, who believe that success is constructed in a very specific way. They've been successful that way, and don't you dare change that. I mean, literally, we had - so talking about exams and inclusion and support for four different people - we introduced some technology, I know Auckland's using Inspira as a trial at the moment, we used it a couple of years ago. And the thing about Inspira is that we initially used that as a tool that allowed us to have devices coming into traditionally proctored invigilated testing environments so students could use keyboards because their experience was basically that nobody uses pens any more and let alone us. Plus people's handwriting was just becoming appalling. So the positive benefits of just being able to use a keyboard to write traditional essay response answers to tests are very obvious. We got a bunch of students coming back to us saying, 'that's not fair. I tend to do better than my peers because I can write faster and more logically, if you let them use a keyboard, they'll be able to do better in the tests and then I'll suffer.' And it's just like, 'Wow,' how can that - in terms of an equity and inclusion challenge, there's a whole mindset in higher education that really drives us badly away from putting in place the changes that are going to be helpful. Coming back to the question though that Kwong Nui asked us that comes from the chat from Jethro. I have real worries that come from my experience in the sustainability of change in education systems and within institutions and within programmes, and the problem that we face often with people who are really out there at the edge trying to help us understand how to do assessment better and create new ways of doing it. The problem is that if they don't bring their colleagues with them, if it's not integrate to a programme view and a long term strategy for whether teaching in that discipline and where that programme is headed, I have seen virtually every single one of those initiatives lost the minute somebody switches focus, so they either have a different priority in the job or they get moved out of that course and into another course. And all of that work is lost because the skills, the knowledge, the understanding of how to enact it are just not present in the colleagues that come into it and whether or not they might want to do it, they simply struggle to understand how to enact something that is completely different to their experience. So there's really a capability development challenge there as well.

**Claire Amos** [00:54:28] Yeah, I think that as well, like I suggest [inaudible] around, we're focussing on exams and other, you know, what are the other assessment strategies? I've been big on this focus on Universal Design for Learning here at Albany Senior High School, and that has meant us really consciously designing assessment to give choice around the modes and the methods and the means that you assist them. But the trap that people often fall into is that they create an assessment and and they say, 'look, you know, evidence you're learning, you can do a podcast, you can do a, you know, sort of AI, you know, this sort of thing.' And then they don't teach young people how to use any of those platform tools or strategies and then wonder why they just get a bunch of essays handed back to them. You know, you can only - you're only going to see success in diverse approaches to assessment opportunities by teaching how students how to engage with them and actually teaching your teachers how to use the different platforms and tools and strategies. And so if you are going to go beyond the essay or beyond the exam, you need to be able to work with your teachers and your students about, like podcasting is hugely powerful being - giving people the option to aurally share the understanding is hugely powerful, you know, and I have been - I'm an English teacher by trade and I'm an ex HoD English and I'm passionate about working with diverse learners. And you know, if you've got a dyslexic or dyspraxia or student or anyone that struggles with organising their words on a page, actually working with them to understand how to podcast or how to have different ways that they evidence their learning is hugely helpful, but only powerful if you teach them and support them to use those technologies and those tools. The other thing that I think is a real trap is that I often think educators don't know what they're assessing. You know, when we talk about different subjects, like English, for instance, you're not assessing how well a person can write. If you look at the achievement standard, if you look at it, you're supposed [emphasis] you're supposed to be assessing how well the person understands the concepts or ideas and how well these link and inform other aspects of a text. More often than not, an educator will mark them on how well they can write, and it's utterly frustrating. So you're not going to get a shift in terms of more inclusive, creative, diverse assessment design until educators understand what it is they're actually assessing. I don't know if that's a problem in university, but I know.

**Stephen Marshall** [00:57:15] Yes. Oh yeah. Oh yeah, definitely.

**Steve Leichtweis** [00:57:17] Yeah, there's a there's a huge focus skew towards what can you acquire? Show me what you've acquired in the content that I've shared this semester, not how can you analyse it? How can you leverage it? How can you use it to address different issues or problems that might arise that you haven't heard me talk about the front of the lecture theatre. So it is a similar problem.

**Claire Amos** [00:57:40] Measure learning through a discussion with a young person far more effectively, often, if you're clear about what it is that you're actually assisting, a conversation is actually more powerful a lot of the time because it unearths a lack of understanding and a lack of in-depth understanding really quickly.

**Steve Leichtweis** [00:58:00] Yeah.

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:58:00] All right.

**Claire Amos** [00:58:02] I get a bit excited [laughter].

**Kwong Nui Sim** [00:58:05] It is an exciting topic. [Laughter] I think we can keep going for another while, but I think time flies and I think we have been on time. So thank you very much, Claire, Steve, and Stephen, for your time and insightful sharing. And I'm sure all of us have gained quite a lot of thoughts and ideas from today's sharing and discussion. And for those who would like to continue this discussion, feel free to connect with our speakers or FLANZ. So, yeah, thank you everyone, and it's great to see so many people joining us today again. Thank you for this lunch hour and once again, thank you, Claire, Steve, and Stephen, stay safe everyone. And kia kahara to those in Auckland.