
This is an electronic version of the transcript of a live event.

All reasonable endeavours were taken to assure the accuracy of the content.

However, due to the nature of capturing a live speaker's words, it is possible that it may contain errors and mistranslations.

Ericsson Broadcast and Media Services accepts no liability for any event or action resulting from this transcript.

The transcript must not be published without Ericsson Broadcast and Media Services' written permission, which may be withheld at its absolute discretion.

Day 2, Thursday 15th September

2:15-2:25pm: Connection as a Human Right

TERESA CORBIN: OK, up next I want to introduce Alastair McEwin, who's the new Disability Discrimination Commissioner. Alastair, you might want to go to the podium. Alastair has had a very distinguished career, and we're very excited – it's written up in your programs – that this role is no longer vacant, which it was for just over a year, I think, because from our perspective, this is a really, really vital role. I'm going to hand over to Danny, who's going to use the microphone, because I understand Alastair will be signing his speech.

ALASTAIR McEWIN: Hello, and welcome. Thank you very much, Teresa, for inviting me to participate in the conference. It's a very exciting opportunity to present to you about accessibility issues. Particularly of accessibility of information and accessibility of technology. I would like to acknowledge that we're meeting on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. And I would like to pay my respects to their elders past and present. I would also like to acknowledge any Indigenous elders who are here today.

Everything today is accessible, one would think – online or via technology. Service models are changing to an online service provision model. It's how we connect to services. If I can give you a few examples... We used to have paper-based billing methods. Now, we can access our billing methods online or our accounts online. If someone wants to contact me, or if I don't pay my bill, I actually get an SMS reminding me. If I apply for a visa, I do that online. If we go to a restaurant after the conference tonight, we can do that online and pre-order. This is very dependent on differing technologies people use – mobile technology, computers, there's software, hardware, different ways of accessing this, different types of connectivity, whether it's broadband or wireless or so on. However, there are many people with disability who face barriers in accessing those types of services. And if I can give you a few examples... Real-life examples from amongst the many complaints we receive at the Commission from people with disability. I can give you two examples. Josie is a woman who's blind. She made a complaint to the commission that the TV station – when they had competitions, they were inaccessible to her because the number that you had to call was just flashed up on the screen. The TV station actually accepted that and said that, when they flashed up information, like that, they would actually follow the same policy that they did in regards to emergency information, where they would also provide an audio cue as well as that visual cue for both emergency information and competition information. If I can give you another example... Matthew. He's a 12-year-old boy. He's blind as well. His complaint to the commission was that he couldn't use a bank's ATM. He couldn't actually figure out what was happening on the screen or what numbers he was pressing. The bank responded to the complaint and said that they actually were in the process of approving accessibility of the ATMs and that they would also make sure that there were some tactile prompts on the screen. They were also investigating the possibility of ensuring that there were audio prompts there for people who couldn't see. And also that they were going to do that at EFTPOS points as well. So the complaint was resolved.

The bank actually invited Matthew to come and address a group of executives, to provide them with feedback about how changes were impacting on him, and what else they could do to improve accessibility.

My work in the commission actually focuses a lot on the accessibility of technology. One of the things we found from recent research is that many government programs or software that's used within government aren't accessible for people with disability. So, for example, they're not accessible for people who use screen readers because they're blind or have low vision. Now, sometimes these things can be resolved through the EAF, which is a government provision of extra funding for people in the workplace, but we've found that actual software that's used by the government itself is sometimes not accessible. And there are interoperability issues as well, with disability equipment. And we're finding that there's a big time lag in getting access to accessible equipment which actually affects people's employment, because they're not able to perform in their role because they can't actually access the equipment or the technology that everybody else in their office is accessing. That's obviously frustrating to the individual, but it's really frustrating to employers as well, and it's a real barrier towards them ever hiring other people with disability. We are seeing, through this change of online services, that there are a number of underlying assumptions. There's an assumption that everybody's got access to the internet, that everyone's got access to technology. And that's a real challenge. Because it would be great if everyone did have that access. Everyone should be able to be online if they want to at any time. I have a vision where we ensure that technology is always accessible and that it would be mentioned in the convention on the human rights of people with disability, which is a UN convention which has been ratified by Australia. Under Article 9, that is something that's essential, and the Australian Government has agreed to it. They've agreed to apply the convention through the national disability strategy. Part of that is promoting and encouraging some standards nationally relating to technology, design of software and hardware. People with disability do continue to face these challenges and barriers towards accessibility. Partly it's because so many services are online. And that barrier can have a lot of impacts. It can have a financial impact, an economic impact on the individual, as I said before in relation to employment or in other issues, because you can't – you could have financial losses. It also means that you might not necessarily have the access to information you need in order to comply with legislation you are supposed to comply with. As I said before, there are employment barriers. Both in looking for work and once you have a job. So I do have ideas, though, about how these challenges can be overcome. And there've been two recent events that have given me more hope. One of them is the recent online census. Now, actually, that was a perfect example of why we need good access for everybody. Legislatively, we're all responsible for doing the census. We have to. And the fact that we were talking about going to an online census made a lot of people nervous originally – people with disability. Because there were concerns about accessibility. But I have to congratulate the ABS. It actually was pretty accessible. And I think we need to really keep an eye on any new developments in technology like that to ensure that, when things particularly are mandatory, that they are fully accessible. The second recent event that I think has been really positive – we recently released a paper called the Willing to Work Report. It made a number of recommendations to the government. Amongst those recommendations was something about the accessibility of IT and other equipment that was procured publicly by the Commonwealth Government. I'm pleased to say that the Commonwealth Government's recently accepted that recommendation, so we will now have a public procurement policy that will ensure accessibility to all people with disability. What that's going to mean is that there's going to be systemic improvements in accessibility and universal design. We have a number of online resources at the commission that I'd encourage you to have a look at. About to ensure that any services that you provide online are accessible to people with disability. And we've actually just made some recent changes to that, so I'd recommend that to you. Just to finish off, I would say that accessibility, and particularly accessibility to technology, is a human right. It makes sense to include accessibility – not only because it's a human right, but also economically – businesses need to think about the market. That's a not-insignificant market, people with disability, Australians with disability. It makes economic sense, and obviously it makes social-justice sense. We've all got a responsibility to ensure accessibility. Thank you.

(APPLAUSE)

TERESA CORBIN: Thanks very much, Alastair. That was an excellent presentation. Now... Two things I want to say before, as the panel gets ready coming up. First of all, you saw Alex present – that's Alex, our intern, not... Yes, exactly. Any students here who'd like to apply for a Google internship, we've just opened up the applications for our next round. That's on our website, if you want to go and have a look at that, or if you know anyone who might like to apply. Secondly, I want to – we're going to play a video now that demonstrates really brilliant audio description. I think I mentioned it earlier today. This is the advertisement that's been playing on Channel 4 in the UK for the Paralympics. While the panel come up, please make yourself at home...

>> Alright, folks, strap in. A drum fills the screen, but the drumsticks are in the feet of a man with no arms. A 10-piece swing band joins in. Featuring a 1-armed bass player and a blind pianist. A lead singer in a blue suit and trilby performs a spin in a wheelchair.

Yes, I can...

>> The lead singer rolls off the stage and onto a road, racing alongside British Paralympian Hannah Cockroft. Then an athlete with one leg hops an impressive high jump. Striking images of people doing things with their feet, from a mother lifting her baby, to a man doing doughnuts in a car around the band.

Yes I can...

A series of wheelchair users, from ballroom dancers to wheelchair rugby players who collide – ouch! The singer rolls into a black-and-white scene, complete with graceful amputee tap-dancers, a pianist with partially formed arms, tap-dancing prosthetic legs, and a chorus line of girls elegantly displaying their stumps. The singer dons a crash helmet and smashes through the set wall. A starter's pistol! Paralympic swimmers racing, then Blade Runner Richard Whitehead sprinting on a track! A rock band appears in the middle of a wheelchair basketball game! A guitarist with one hand rocks out, while the lead guitarist plays a solo with his feet! A blind footballer lifts a finger to his lips. Blind footballer scores a goal! Back of the net!

A series of people shout "Yes, I can" while showing their abilities, including Paralympic swimmer Ellie Simmons, Libby Clegg, a shot-putter and cyclist, wheelchair multi-Paralympian David Weir, a pilot with no arms, a gymnast with one hand, a graduate with Down syndrome, a ballerina with a prosthetic leg, three Paralympic powerlifters, a deaf signer, and a breakdancer. Phew! Did you get all that? A careers advisor talks to a boy in a wheelchair...

>> No, you can't.

(BELL RINGS)

>> Yes, I can!

>> The boy is now a Paralympics GB wheelchair rugby player and crashes into an opponent. A rockclimber with one arm missing below the elbow, martial artists kicking ass, then heart-warming footage of children using prosthetic limbs at home and at school. A man in a wheelchair performs a death-defying stunt, and a man with partially formed arms brushes his teeth. We're the superhumans – Rio 2016 Paralympics!

(APPLAUSE)