UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN QUEENSLAND

# Preparing Young People for Adulthood

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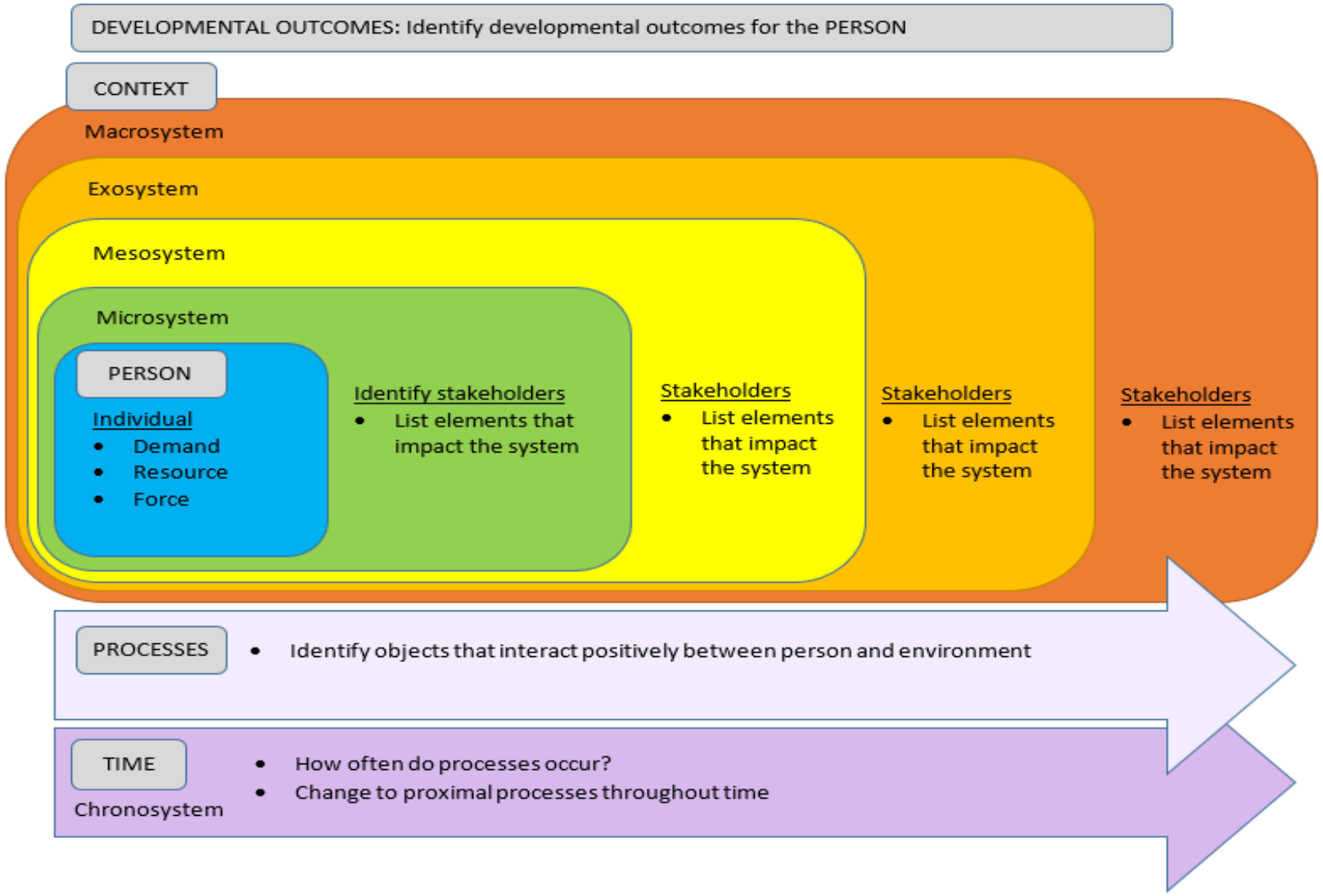
# Background

This study explored barriers and enablers in Australian mainstream secondary schools for students with blindness and low vision.

The study sought to explore:

- what a range of stakeholders perceived enabled and/or inhibited participation in learning and future employability for secondary students with blindness and low vision,
- the implications of this knowledge for future employability and practice for educators.

# Methodology



# Participants

- Students (6) – 2 low vision, 3 legally blind, 1 totally blind
- Education Stakeholders' perspectives
  - teaching staff (6)
  - advisory teachers/therapists (6)
  - policy makers (4)
- Additional Stakeholders' perspectives
  - parents/carers (6)
  - people with lived experience (4) - 1 low vision, 2 legally blind, 1 totally blind
  - employment consultant/ employers (4)

# Methodology - Interviews

Interview questions were focused to elicit understanding of the barriers and/or enablers that impacted students with blindness and low vision the developmental outcomes:

a) participation in learning, and

b) future employability

Data analysis - Stake's multiple case study methodology

# Findings - students

- Access to curriculum materials
  - Support from classroom teachers
  - Additional support to access learning
- Assistive technology
  - Knowledge and use of access technology
  - Barriers to use of technology
- Preparedness for employment
  - Skills required in the workforce
  - Preparation for employment

# Findings – participation in learning

- Developmental outcome of participation in learning

> "The Australian education system promotes equity and excellence" (Education Council, 2019, p. 6).

Being blind or having low vision was identified as impacting participation in learning by all stakeholders within this study, excluding the disability consultant/employer.

This was illustrated by 35% of references in the empirical data which identified the impact of their sensory disability on learning (n = 340, N = 968).

# Findings – participation in learning

- Barriers
  - Inability to access the curriculum
  - Reduced opportunities to participate in learning (external examinations and extra-curricula activities)
  - Subject barriers – mathematics (STEM)

# Findings – participation in learning

- Enablers
  - All students access materials independently through AT and compensatory skills
  - Stakeholders (n=21 of 36) discussed the implementation of many disability-specific skills as an enabler to participate in learning, including compensatory skills, assistive technology, braille, self-determination, social skills and orientation and mobility

# Findings – future employability

- Developmental outcome of future employability

> "All young Australians become confident and creative individuals, successful lifelong learners, and active and informed members of the community" (Education Council, 2019, p. 4).

References from stakeholder responses evidenced the following themes: knowledge to do the job, personal characteristics, social and communication skills, and disability-specific skills.

| Stakeholder | Knowledge to do the job (cognitive skills) | Personal characteristics (intrapersonal) | Social skills (interpersonal) | Disability-specific skills |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Students** | • general technology programs and skills | • presentable<br>• efficient<br>• happy and willing to serve | • communication<br>• teamwork<br>• dealing with bullies | • support to creating resumes and cover letters<br>• assistive technology<br>• orientation and mobility (O & M) |
| **Teaching staff** | • curriculum content | • organisation | | • assistive technology |
| **Advisory teachers/ therapists** | | • confidence<br>• independence<br>• make decisions | | • workplace structure<br>• knowledge of types of jobs<br>• knowledge of job requirements<br>• opportunities for participation<br>• assistive technology<br>• braille<br>• compensatory skills |
| **Policy-Makers** | • access to work materials | • independence<br>• make decisions | • group activities | • career counselling<br>• participation in jobs<br>• chores<br>• braille<br>• O & M<br>• assistive technology |
| **Parents** | | • troubleshoot<br>• make decisions<br>• independent<br>• time management | • social interactions | • support to choose subjects<br>• guidance officer<br>• assistive technology<br>• O & M |
| **People with lived experience** | | • independent<br>• beliefs of others | • social skills<br>• access to extra curriculum activities<br>• support systems | • opportunities for participation<br>• compensatory skills<br>• braille<br>• assistive technology |
| **Employment consultant/ employers** | • knowledge to do the job<br>• access to work materials | • high expectations (previously modelled by others) | • social interactions | • opportunities for participation<br>• access—ability to make modifications independently<br>• assistive technology<br>• O & M<br>• braille |

**Table 8.1 Stakeholders' Perceptions of Factors That Influence Future Employability**

# Findings – future employability

- Employability skills for all students

  - cognitive components of employment, such as literacy, numeracy, and technology skills, along with critical thinking
  - intrapersonal skills, such as work ethic, attitude, and self-regulation, and
  - interpersonal skills, such as communication and the ability to work in a team

Career readiness framework (Warner et al., 2020)

# Findings – future employability

- Employability skills specific to students with blindness and low vision

  - compensatory access,
  - assistive technology,
  - sensory efficiency,
  - self-determination,
  - orientation and mobility, and
  - learning about work

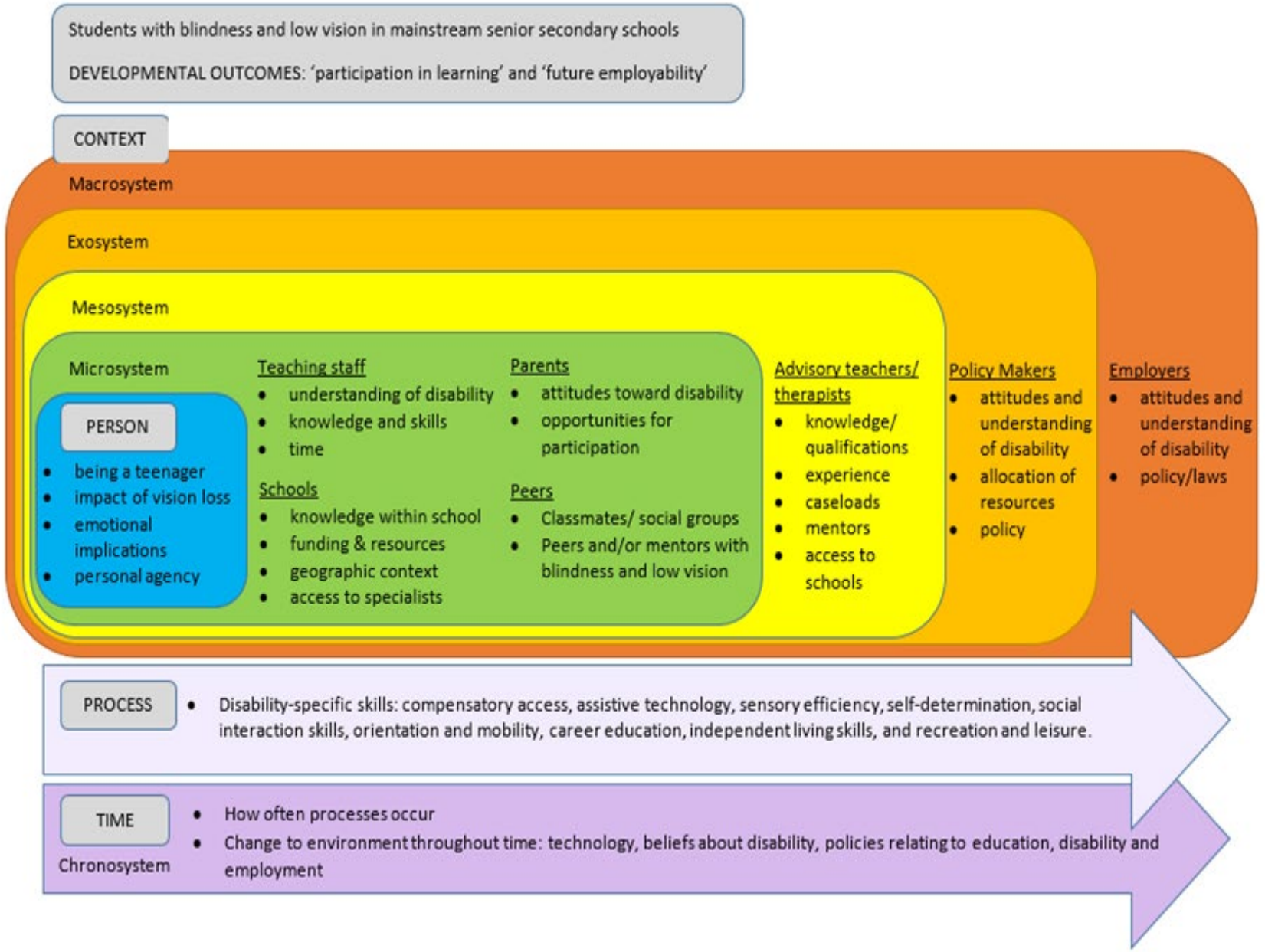
# Findings – importance of time

- Underprepared for transition to employment
  - Practicing work
  - Access technology skills
  - O&M

Time

Changes over time – assistive technology, support in education

# Findings – person and context



# Recommendations

- Recognise That Students With Blindness and Low Vision Are a Diverse Group With Individual Needs
- Promote Technology for Independent Access to Learning
- A collaborative approach to learning is necessary
- Increase Focus of, and Support for, Employability

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