

Disability Employment Service Future – Consultation Report

28 April 2015

Prepared by:

E-QUAL (Enhancing Quality)

36/18 Stirling Highway

Nedlands WA 6009

PO Box 200

Nedlands WA 6909

Tel: 08 9389 9930

Fax: 08 9389 1199

Email: e-qual@e-qual.net

Web: www.e-qual.net



Contents

Contents	1
Introduction.....	2
Method.....	2
Participants in the focus groups.....	2
Summary of feedback.....	3
Client feedback.....	6
Schools feedback	12
Employer feedback.....	16
Consumer group feedback	20
Government and Community Groups feedback.....	25

Introduction

National Disability Services (NDS) together with the Association for Competitive Employment WA (ACE WA) contracted E-QUAL to conduct five focus groups with stakeholders about the future of disability employment services (DES) beyond 2018. The specific requirements of the consultation were:

- Conduct five focus group meetings with stakeholder groups - clients, schools, employers, consumer groups and government/community organisations;
- Analyse feedback and themes emerging from the focus groups;
- Prepare and submit a written report on each focus group meeting;
- Prepare up to five case studies reflecting the feedback.

Method

The methodology included:

- A briefing session with ACE WA, NDS and E-QUAL
- Developing consultation questions for each stakeholder group
- Facilitating focus groups
- Summary of focus group notes shared with participants for further comment
- Analysing all feedback and preparing report
- Developing case studies

Participants in the focus groups

The focus groups were held at the Edge Employment Solutions office in Subiaco between 25 March – 1 April 2015. A total of 31 people participated in the focus group meetings and a further four people provided feedback in writing or during an interview with an NDS representative. Table One provides further details of participants from each stakeholder group.

Table One – Participants from each stakeholder group

Participants	Clients	Employers	Schools	Consumer groups	Government and community groups	Total
Participants in focus group	6	3	11	6	5	31
Contributors via email or interview	3	-	-	-	1	4
Total	9	3	11	6	6	35

Summary of feedback

Table Two provides a summary of the feedback received from each stakeholder group under the six discussion areas:

- Communication
- Support
- Quality of staff
- Choice and control
- Collaboration
- Suggestions for a future employment support model

Table Two – Summary of feedback themes across groups and discussion areas

Stakeholder group	Discussion area	Themes
Clients	Communication	Good communication between DES and employer Relationship with DES staff important Administration aspects a burden
	Support	On the job support is important but limited by too many rules
	Quality of staff	Good staff are focused on getting the best outcome for the person
	Choice and control	Choice and control is limited by the system DES have to operate in
	Collaboration	Some good examples of collaboration but could be more
Schools	Communication	Communication between DES and schools needs to be improved
	Support	More support is needed for work placements while student at school
	Quality of staff	Good staff have a positive attitude, know the student well, are realistic about options and have relevant skills High staff turnover affects service quality
	Choice and control	Choice and control is limited by the system DES have to operate in Employment options are limited
	Collaboration	More collaboration is needed

Stakeholder group	Discussion area	Themes
Employers	Communication	DES communicate well with employers Administration aspects a burden Complex system to navigate
	Support	On the job support is generally very good Better job preparation is needed
	Quality of staff	Staff generally good quality Staff could learn more about work expectations and disability awareness
	Choice and control	Choice and control is limited by the system DES have to operate in
	Collaboration	Some good examples of collaboration but could be more
Consumer groups	Communication	Navigating the Centrelink system is difficult Quality of communication depends on the individual staff member
	Support	Good on the job support is valuable Support isn't always tailored to the individuals needs
	Quality of staff	Good staff are committed, know the person, and have the right skills and knowledge Better strategies needed to deal with high staff turnover
	Choice and control	Choice and control is limited by the system DES have to operate in
	Collaboration	Some good examples of collaboration but could be more, especially with employers
Government and community groups	Communication	Communication between DES, schools and training providers needs to improve
	Support	On the job support is important but limited by too many rules More support is needed to develop people in their work and study and help people with intellectual disability into work
	Quality of staff	Good staff are critical High staff turnover affects service quality

Stakeholder group	Discussion area	Themes
		Staff need more knowledge about career options and the impact of disability
	Choice and control	Choice and control is limited by the system DES have to operate in Options limited, particularly for people with intellectual disability
	Collaboration	Some good examples of collaboration
All groups	Suggestions for a future employment support model	Better school to work transition More work preparation Support for volunteer work Better marketing to employers More flexibility in “system” to meet individual needs Less focus on KPIs and more focus on people More job creation More support for people with higher support needs/intellectual disability

A report on the feedback received from each stakeholder group follows. The key themes in each discussion area are identified and examples of comments provided, as much as possible using the participants own words.

Client feedback

Six clients participated in the focus group held on 31/3/15. A further three clients were unable to attend and instead participated in interviews with an NDS representative.

Communication

Good communication between DES and employer

Clients appreciated the communication between their employer and the DES (where required as some people did not need this).

- “I ask her to email my boss before she visits so if any issues she can help me when she comes in. Sometimes they (the boss) don’t want to upset me by telling me something is not going well. She can explain things more softly.”
- “I deal directly with my employer, not the DES role, I am in charge.”
- “They (DES) assisted me to get this job. They are able to explain things to the employer better and get you in the door.”

Relationship with DES staff important

Clients valued having a “point of contact” (one particular staff member). Clients said they didn’t like changing from one DES staff member to another when they had built a relationship.

- “The good support workers are those you have known a long time and they know a lot about me and they also share things about their life and are more like a friend.”

Some clients said the amount of communication was adequate, others said they sometimes met just to sign the paperwork and appointments were too short, “only 10 minutes”.

Administration aspects a burden

One person said the paperwork was “over the top” and the Employment Pathway Plan didn’t really say anything of value (others agreed).

Clients said the process of moving from one provider to another was “quite a hassle” and one person said that when they swapped providers they had to go through Centrelink again to confirm their support needs. One client said “its nerve racking (worry they will cut the funding) when you have a job and family to look after.”

Support

On the job support is important but limited by too many rules

Clients valued employment “want to contribute, feel worthy, be part of society” and the support of the DES. They found it frustrating that the support was limited by rules about outcomes rather than individual needs.

- “Not respected for what you can bring, more for your productivity (by both employers and government).”

Clients said DES should support volunteering.

- “More skill development through volunteering. Biggest challenge is raising your confidence after you haven’t been well. Support person gave me heaps of encouragement. But because no job for me they got no funding yet I needed that support in volunteering / being a contributor, gaining confidence.”

Clients wanted to be confident that support would be ongoing and not have to worry about continually proving their support needs.

- “Prefer we keep the ongoing support and not get it cut off because I am doing so well. If something goes wrong I wouldn’t be able to get their help. So much better if I have them ongoing. Harder if have to start again. Only way I can keep that help is if my job is in jeopardy – have to do something bad to keep them! Government sees dollars and not person and their individual needs.”
- “My provider has to come and see me every two weeks (I go to them sometimes as needs to be face to face) to make sure we demonstrate my ongoing support needs. I don’t need that level of support at the moment but I might need it later e.g. if I change jobs. Annoying that I have to take time out each fortnight to see them just to tick boxes to keep support.”
- “Working is not my top priority at the moment. My mother died recently and I have lost my main member in my support network. I am not well at the moment and find it hard to talk to people. I would like to get onto a disability pension and get myself well but I have been assessed as being able to work. It seems that because I have worked in the past I should be able to work now. I can’t seem to get across that I am sick and unable to work at the moment. I wish someone would help me to get a DSP.”

One client said the DES was supportive with accessing workplace modifications through Job Access and reassuring the employer that the necessary equipment could be accessed. Job Access were sometimes limiting however and recently rejected one clients request for new voice recognition software (they had been provided with software in 2007 which was deemed to be adequate).

Another client said they had good support from the DES in interpreting employer feedback.

- “With mental health can get paranoid, poor social skills/understanding so can use my DES staff as a filter to ‘interpret’ reality and give me suggestions how to

handle things. When I didn't have this I was bullied, had breakdowns, didn't know how to cope with politics at work place."

Clients also appreciated the support they received to find work.

- "Difficult negotiating the support you need with an employer because you are new, nervy, tentative – great to have that support from DES."
- "When I first got the job I was so wound up about what had happened to me that I couldn't focus. My support worker helped me keep focused and helped me to stick it out. I probably would have lost the job if it wasn't for them. They are really encouraging."
- "I see my provider as a resource that I use when I need them. Their support allows me to have a level playing field."
- "They need a better database for staff – too hard for them. Includes all employer contacts not just the positive ones so we waste time contacting employers who aren't supportive."
- "The most important support for me is getting assistance to attend interviews. Transport assistance is a great help for me."

One client said they were referred to a specialist provider (vision) which was useful because they understood their needs.

Clients said some agencies were just placing people and not following up with ongoing support.

- "Some just see you when they need to and they make you feel like a number and not a person."

Quality of staff

Good staff are focused on getting the best outcome for the person

Clients said what they valued in staff was:

- sincerity, really want to help me
- finding me work, something to do
- understands your needs and what you are looking for
- encourage you, give you positive feedback
- keep momentum going, thinking ahead about next steps for you. Ask you – what's next? What else do you need? Future plans? E.g. more training for you, planning re future needs to keep your job even if can't help they connect you to opportunities. E.g. leadership development, skill development, your passions e.g. public speaking
- supportive personality
- ethical – not just sales people
- good communicators
- think about client as a person and fight system to get person what right
- can see the ability/potential in you that you can't see – their belief gets you there

Clients said support staff varied in quality.

- “I have been with two DES, the first one was hopeless. If I was measuring them out of 10 I would give them a zero. But my current provider I would give them 8 out of 10.”
- “Some staff are really good and some staff see you as a number and see you only for what they want. They don’t listen to you. I have asked to have my support worker changed twice and this has been done.”

Clients said DES staff didn’t have enough time to help them because they had too many people on their caseloads.

Choice and control

Choice and control is limited by the system DES have to operate in

Clients said choice and control was limited by several factors.

No support for people already in work to find different jobs

- “Enjoy my job. Would like something different but because I am not a job seeker it’s harder – system doesn’t support this.”

Have to work a minimum of eight hours to get support

- “Your capacity to work varies from person to person, and at stages of your wellness/life. To have a set requirement for hours is silly.”

Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) needs to say you are capable of working

- One person had a JCA to he could get DES support. They said he wasn’t capable of working but he already had a job and just needed the DES support on the job. Centrelink changed the paperwork so he could get the DES support.
- Another person “I had to get my psychiatrist to change the letter to say I was well/not well – depending on best outcome for JCA/Centrelink. Lucky my psychiatrist was Ok about that.”
- Another person had a very quick JCA. “They just looked at me to confirm I still had my disability – ridiculous.”

Have to go to the DES that is for your suburb

- “If an agency is doing a good job, why take their area or people and give them to someone else? Relationship with consumer is important. They get confused. Not fair on people with disability. People tempted to lie to get provider they want. Should have choice of who they go.”

Support only for paid work

- Clients said volunteer work should be supported.

Clients also said that other things restricted choice and control including:

Whether you can communicate and are assertive

- “One of my disabilities is bi-polar and I feel pressured to disclose this to my employer and then my co-workers find out. I would rather only disclose this if I have an episode and need to make arrangements to deal with this. I think disclosing this disability should be left up to the individual.”
- Some people aren’t good at communicating.

Fear of losing other benefits

- Having a job sometimes has a negative impact on other options e.g. CAP support, pension, state housing. Losing health care card a worry for some people. More information would be helpful from DES about this.

Employment market

- “Have to be realistic that some limits on choice due to employment market and your skills etc. Need to be realistic about what you can do.”
- “Pressure to take any job. Employers have said this too.”

Collaboration

Some good examples of collaboration but could be more

Clients noted that collaboration depends on the agency and their flexibility.

Successful examples included:

- WAAMH links mental health providers with a DES that can meet their clients’ needs.
- Visability partners with DES to get the on the job support.
- LACs can fund some projects – e.g. skill building opportunities, to get a job.
- Employer breakfasts jointly organised by local government and DES.

Clients suggested there could be more collaboration between DES e.g. sharing vacancies they can’t fill.

Suggestions for a future employment support model

Suggestions included:

- Government should stick with and support and develop the proven companies that have been around rather than new ‘pop ups’.
- A big data base of jobs that people could do (and others didn’t want to do). Fit person to job.
- An agency that profiles you first and matches you. Takes you to job for three months trial with support. After three months, more if needed.
- If person is scared to start, try just an hour of volunteer work to get them started so feel like you are contributing something (and developing skills).
- Get rid of the eight hour requirement.

- More support for people with higher support needs.
- More specialised staff – e.g. in a particular disability e.g. an intellectual disability team, or a mental health team – all in one agency.
- Look more for development opportunities for people with disability. OK to start at bottom if developed.
- Would be good if more job creation for people who had less ability physically or mentally so could feel like contributing. Basic jobs have vanished, automated etc – need physical or social capability. Everyone wants to feel useful and valuable. E.g. create jobs from the things others don't want to do or have no time to do e.g. admin, cup washing etc that CEO doing.
- DES should look at the whole person rather than just work. Some people need support in everyday living skills that they have missed out on.

Schools feedback

Eleven school representatives participated in the focus group held on 25/3/15.

Communication

Communication between DES and schools needs to be improved

Schools were critical of the communication with DES providers. They said:

- “We have to contact them to establish a relationship.”
- “They don’t liaise with school to get feedback on work experiences.”
- “Don’t listen and appreciate professional judgement of school regarding person’s previous experience.”
- “Seem too busy when we ask for info. Have asked them to come to speak at school career nights but often they don’t.”

Schools noted that they had better relationships with DES prior to loss of contracts and change to new providers. They wanted to know which agencies were in their area and what particular supports they could provide e.g. links to a particular employer or specialist support for a particular type of disability, so they could share this with students and families and help them choose the most suitable DES.

Schools wanted better communication between DES, school and family. They wanted to be more involved in discussions re aspirations and transition to work support needs and development of plans e.g. My Plan (DSC), NDIA plan, Employment Plans. They were concerned that students were getting mixed messages e.g. dream big versus be realistic. They wanted DES to “be honest with the student and school” and set “realistic expectations”. “If it isn’t going to happen don’t give false hope.”

Schools said that more information sharing between DES, schools and family would make the school to work transition easier.

Support

More support is needed for work placements while student at school

Most schools representatives were struggling to get work experience placements in either open employment or supported employment, and wanted more support with this. They noted that ADEs could provide useful skills training and mentioned EMS Workpower as a good example.

Some schools said they find it easy to get work experience placements but don’t have the resources to provide the on the job support.

Schools valued the job support/mentoring role provided by DES. The employment support person/mentor was a motivator for some students and had valuable contacts in

the community. On the job support also reassures employers about taking on a person with disability and employer incentives helped. One person suggested support could be provided for a longer period.

- “Agencies could stay longer on the job with the client as at this stage they only set them up and then spend very short periods of time with them and while they are happy to return to sort problems, sometimes the problems could have been avoided altogether if support had been there for longer periods of time.”

Schools said students needed more on the job support for work experience, starting from Year 11.

Some schools said the SWEAT program (Supported Work Experience Assistance Program) run by Edge was good however after the subsidy ran out the student would often lose the job and be disappointed. This program was no longer offered.

Staff

Good staff have a positive attitude, know the student well, are realistic about options and have relevant skills

Schools said staff made all the difference. They said good staff:

- don't judge parents
- enthusiastic, want to be there
- previous experience in disability
- get to know client rather than make assumptions
- look at what the student has done before
- understand/appreciate individual differences/needs
- knowledge of industry student interested in
- training skills
- flexibility
- ability to sell their product i.e. point out the benefits of the student, support available etc
- realistic about options e.g. may benefit from an ADE placement initially so experience success
- work towards students dream in a realistic way e.g. one student who wanted to do child care but didn't have skills so instead placed in a play/activity centre where parents supervising their own children and staff there to support which was better match to skills and still good link to aspiration

High staff turnover affects service quality

Schools said the turnover wasn't helpful and queried whether DES staff were paid fairly and had access to enough professional development.

Schools said they preferred having one consultant to work with rather than one doing registration, another doing job search and so on.

- “We have to keep retelling their story.”
- “May feel satisfied that you have a good relationship with one consultant then next thing you know you have another.”

Choice and control

Choice and control is limited by the system DES have to operate in

Schools said choice and control was limited by certain factors.

Have to go to the DES that is for your suburb

- Some DES providers “are better suited to a student’s needs or have connections in particular areas of work” but if the student doesn’t live in that area they cannot use them.

DES not able to help until Year 12

- “Best outcome is if they get work before school finishes.”

Fear of losing pension

- “If person works more than 20 hours/week they lose their pension.”

Employment options are limited

Schools said employment options were limited.

- “Some students don’t want to go to an ADE” but limited other choices.
- “Want a broader range of employment opportunities for capable students other than fast food industry.”
- Students are not getting work. “We are hearing about our better students still doing nothing after 9 months. Losing skills and increased isolation.”
- “Have had students registered with DES after doing many hours of work experience and then offered more work experience by DES. What student really wanting is a step up from that. A work trial for a job would be ok but not just more work experience.”
- “Industry expectation of minimum of Cert II and many students struggle to achieve this.”

Collaboration

More collaboration is needed

Schools said there were “better outcomes when we work as a team”. Schools said there should be DES support from year 11, and together with student, family, school, and LAC, a school to work transition plan to get things right and start building relationships should be developed.

Suggestions for a future employment support model

Suggestions included:

- Support volunteer work. It's still a valuable role. DES should be funded for this.
- Take students to work places to look at options e.g. industry visits (some schools said they do this) or displays.
- Attract more parents to Ability Expos and include more practical jobs in expo.
- A checklist for parents so the student and family are better prepared.
- Some kids not ready for work, need further skill development and maturity. Need another option e.g. a life skills and work combination (pre vocational training), transition to work program, literacy, numeracy, life skills and work skills.
- Provide something in between an ADE and real employment where gaining skills and being paid.
- Promote employers who take on people with disability to show others it can be successful.
- Once student registered, hold meetings at the school so a safe place to meet.

Employer feedback

Three employers participated in the focus group held on 1/4/15.

Communication

DES communicate well with employers

Employers were very satisfied with the level of engagement they had with DES.

- “Level of engagement has been fantastic. All involved in achieving one thing – support for sustainable outcomes.”
- “Has been great to have a person liaising between trainee, training supervisor and employer.”
- “Excellent level of communication. Feels easy - never have to chase them up. Clearly about the person, want them to be successful. Know they need the support and will stay as long as need.”
- “Equally respect employers and people with disability.”

Administration aspects a burden

One employer noted that there were different levels of communication needed with small/medium business versus “corporate Australia” and this was a challenge for DES. Large business/corporates needed a quality service that would meet their needs and were not interested in wage subsidies. Large business also found the administration requirements of employing through a DES “a pain” and suggested “surely there is another way to verify their placement”.

Complex system to navigate

Employers said the sector could be confusing with “too many peak bodies, different agendas, different subject matter experts, different government programs – DES (2 streams), Job Services Australia (4 streams)”.

Support

On the job support is generally very good

Employers were generally impressed with the on the job support.

- “On the job support has been excellent – Rolls Royce service for us! Helped with job description, longer period of support than I thought, quick response when an issue, experienced staff member – knew how best to support her.”
- “Don’t let them get away with thinking its home and they can behave as if they were at home.”

- “Also been good at getting them connected and supported at work so can wear off. Help them increase skills, improve communication, more confidence so can be independent and know that DES support available if need – just phone.”
- “Alert us if any issues and usually sort them out for us.”

One employer had experienced both good and not so good support.

- “One provider – no support, didn’t follow up with person, said they couldn’t schedule meetings/support – just dropped in when it suited them. I introduced her (the worker) to another DES and she was shocked that she had received so little service from the previous provider. Previous service didn’t understand her disability. Other DES instead knows the person more and much better outcome for her once they were involved.”

Employers noted that a bad experience in the workplace can negatively impact on the people working around the person. They said that whilst the organisational culture is the responsibility of the employer, the DES can help with education of coworkers.

Better job preparation is needed

Employers said workers needed better job preparation e.g. basic skills like answering phone, ringing in when sick, protocols about using mobile phone at work etc. One employer said they had been going out to Job Clubs (some DES run) and talking about their expectations. Another employer was also doing similar talks with indigenous groups. Employers said this should be the DES role, not theirs, but queried whether DES staff had the knowledge/skills or time to do it. It was suggested that DES staff could benefit from a greater understanding of how to prepare people for employment along the lines of recent workshop conducted by Developmental Disability WA for families. Providing tips to help the person get a job would also be useful.

Employers wanted DES to:

Provide more information about the prospective employee

Employers said they would rather know more about the jobseeker “warts and all” before they were placed. They said they needed to know the impact of the disability on work not just the “label”.

- “One fellow they (the DES) didn’t realise the extent of his learning disability. Expectation was that he had literacy skills because he had graduated from school but these were limited. He had been booked into a Cert III in Government which would have been too difficult. He needed heaps of support just to complete Cert II”.
- “Need to know potential as well and career aspirations. Also, have to appreciate what’s possible in the business. Like anyone, may not be able to achieve all your aspirations at all or with one employer.”
- “Not my role to say what job they would be best suited to.”

Provide realistic and transparent information about job outcomes

One employer said more support was needed for those people still on the DES books with no outcome after 12 months. They said there needed to be realistic job expectations and greater transparency about the reasons why no employment outcome e.g. a lack of jobs overall, something about the jobseeker themselves (skills, behavior), location they are looking for work in, their job choice is limiting etc.

One employer said there seemed to be a gap in employment support for Indigenous people with disability and questioned whether this group was aware of the availability of DES services.

Quality of staff

Staff generally good quality

Employers had generally experienced good staff.

- “One particular worker was excellent – should could clone her!”

Employers said good staff:

- know person well, not just work side
- are skilled at matching skills and interests to a job
- understand the business of the employer (if don't then a bad job match)
- “get into bed” with organisation, “through thick and thin”, develop together
- can develop the skills of supervisors to support person with disability. “Not all supervisors have skills to support/develop person with disability.”

Staff could learn more about work expectations and disability awareness

Areas where DES staff could improve included:

- knowing what expectations of work are
- disability awareness. “Not consistent messaging.”

Employers had not worked with recruitment services to be able to make any comparisons.

Choice and control

Choice and control is limited by the system DES have to operate in

Employers said the minimum of eight hours of work to qualify for DES support was limiting choice for workers.

- “Person may have to build up to get to eight hours”
- “Best outcome for person is some hours – wrong that expectation of minimum of eight. Need more flexibility.”

Employers also said it was “stupid that people have to go to certain DES based on their postcode – no choice”.

One employer said that traineeships were an opportunity that was underutilised by DES in part because the Education Department wanted students to stay until year 12.

Collaboration

Some good examples of collaboration but could be more

Employers said that collaboration has good value, but if there is no outcome it gets frustrating. One employer mentioned a national hospitality employment network focusing on increasing employment outcomes for people with disability.

Another said there were interagency forums within government about barriers and breaking them down. Another said they were working with families on improving expectations of people with disability e.g. expectations of work, independence, relationships.

One employer said that corporate Australia wanted to invest in this area, but more support was needed with work preparation – “educating job seekers about work and work practices, responsibilities etc”.

Employers also said DES could collaborate more with families and engage them in supporting the person find work.

Suggestions for a future employment support model

Suggestions included:

- Strong pre-employment program, starting in schools, including work placements (get parents to help find them), and no pressure that this work will be what you do forever.
- More of a team approach re work placement between school and family.
- Develop parent network where parents get together and say “we have kids and they want work placements – who has a business that can help?” Can’t always rely on government resourcing it.
- Ambassadors (people with disability) going back to schools and talking about their experiences, good, bad and ugly. Raising expectations and awareness of opportunities. More impact when person with real experience shares their stories.
- Get people to consider extending their comfort zone, extend themselves, e.g. if worried about using public transport support them to keep trying it, to alleviate anxiety etc. As you do that could open up possibilities for them.
- If volunteer work a step towards employment and developing skills etc then perhaps DES could support. Outcome is a fuller life and also learn work preparation/readiness skills.
- More job creation. “People too PC (politically correct), worried about giving person all the menial jobs. Value of work for person so important. Good DES would be encouraging/enquiring about this.”

Consumer group feedback

Five representatives of agencies who support people with disabilities and one parent participated in the focus group held on 25/3/15.

Communication

Navigating the Centrelink system to get DES support is difficult

Participants said that one of the key issues with communicating with DES was getting access to the support in the first place through the Centrelink system. Comments included:

- Easier to get a job yourself than navigate the Centrelink/ DES stuff.
- When already a vulnerable person and have to deal with a complex and rigid program, not helpful.
- “Centrelink can be an intimidating place for people, and more so those that may have severe and persistent mental illness.”
- Centrelink assessments for job capacity horrible – you know what you can do.
- Complex system and “micro managed admin”. If paperwork incomplete have been knocked back for DES support.
- “Changing jobs have to be reassessed by Centrelink for JCA – even if worked for 25 years.”
- People with mental health diagnosis not keen to go to DES, feel like second class citizens, need proof of diagnosis – so complex, layered.
- Delay in ESA (equivalent to JCA) assessments being detrimental to the motivation of individuals wanting to gain employment.

Quality of communication depends on the individual staff member

Participants said that they had had varied levels of communication depending on the individual DES staff member and said it was disappointing the staff turnover was so high because you could lose someone had a good relationship with.

Participants said DES “promise a lot up front” but clients often don’t get an interview in three months. It was suggested that “DES should be harnessing person’s motivation within first 30 days of registration.”

Support

Good on the job support is valuable

Participants noted that many jobseekers do nothing to help themselves and just expect the DES to find them work. They said it was important staff got the balance right between supporting people and facilitating the process of finding a job.

Participants appreciated various aspects of the DES support:

- Wage subsidy
- On the job support
- Wage connect (like a wage subsidy)
- Job clubs (Some participants experienced good outcomes, said peer support can be beneficial)
- Work place modifications funding

Support isn't always tailored to the individuals needs

Participants said support wasn't however tailored to the needs of the individual and commented:

- "Employment Support Plans too often all the same."
- "They said I was too hard because I wanted a professional job"
- DES "provided support as if I had an intellectual disability" i.e. there all day every day. "Should have treated me as individual."

Participants said support was also limited by the "system" and commented:

- "Can't get consultant support when you are already in work. Should be providing advice/career development both before and while at work."
- "Have to have minimum eight hours paid work."
- "Seems to be all about the money – getting the dollars for the KPI/outcome e.g. 13 weeks."

Qualities of staff

Good staff are committed, know the person, and have the right skills and knowledge

Participants said good staff should be:

- dedicated
- have perseverance
- person driven
- good interpersonal skills
- know the area that they are looking for work in
- have sales skills but also be person centred
- networking and spending most of their time in the community (not in the office)
- flexible and proactive, open to opportunities, developing /creating jobs
- know how to facilitate natural supports – e.g. not stay too long/too short

Areas of need included:

- "understanding people from CALD (culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds) and not giving up on them"

- “specialised expertise for those with fluctuating psycho-social or dual diagnosis support needs seeking competitive employment”

Better strategies needed to deal with high staff turnover

Participants said high job turnover was a problem and better handling of change of staff to avoid uncertainty in transition process was needed. They put the high job turnover down to poor pay, stressful work, and always looking for work for others so see opportunities for themselves. They also said it was a common problem that the DES didn't replace staff quickly and suggested this was to save money.

Choice and control

Choice and control is limited by the system DES have to operate in

Participants said choice and control was limited in the DES system by a number of issues.

Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) needs to say you are capable of working

- “Should be employment support for all people, not just those assessed as capable.”
- “Could motivation be the eligibility rather than a JCA?”

Have to go to the DES that is for your suburb

- “Having to go to a DES in a certain area/suburb means less choice. Should be able to choose the service you go to.”

Have to work a minimum of eight hours to get support

- “Because of fluctuating nature of many mental illnesses eight hour benchmark can pose a barrier to those looking to re-engage with the workforce and actually persuade them to remain on income support benefit.”

Options limited/inflexible

- “Should have option to go to JSA if you want.”
- JSA's have greater wage subsidy and so employers go more for them (level four disability only).
- “Can't get help when change jobs because have to exit system or go through another assessment – not equitable!”
- “No flexibility re use of Employer Assistance Funding (JSA's only eligible) e.g. may have \$6000 each and one needs more and one less but can't pool it”

DES contracts based on meeting star ratings

- “Stars don't equal good service. May have five stars but do staff have right attitude – person centred? If DES doesn't get star ratings, lose their patch and relationships destroyed. “
- “How do star ratings result in better outcomes for clients? Is client satisfaction a factor in star ratings? Do people with disability care about star ratings? Some do, some don't.”

Fear of losing pension

- “Don’t make people come off a pension or swap to another pension e.g. Newstart, because can lose key benefits/allowances.”
- “Risky losing pension/benefits.”

Collaboration

Some good examples of collaboration but could be more, especially with employers

Examples of collaboration included:

- Visability has partnerships with DES. They find the work and DES provides the support.
- EDAC gets involved when person at risk of losing job e.g. most often due to change of case worker. Sometimes DES ask for CALD competency training
- Collaboration between DES and mental health providers to support people through crisis times to stay in jobs. Have been able to decide whether to go with an ESS or DMS depending on needs.

Collaboration has not been so good with advocacy agencies because “we come in when problems”.

Better collaboration is always good. Collaboration with employers could be better. Seeing more examples of people working is a good way to change attitudes. Showing people workplaces where people with disability working a great eye opener – e.g. visits.

One person also noted “Instability of the sector creates issues with established collaborative relationships – tendering, ratings and reallocation has an impact on the job seeker and their support needs.”

Suggestions for a future employment support model

Participants said “employment is an awesome outcome”. “Other countries getting better outcomes – Australia an embarrassment. Too stuck in deficit model.”

Suggestions included:

- Quotas work in some countries – some risks but if employed on merits, could raise awareness. EEO doesn’t work.
- Start career development earlier i.e. at school. Having some paid work during school really helps with securing work.
- Focus on satisfaction rather than volume. Get away from placement in job just for jobs sake, more on job you want. If need to take any job you are capable of (e.g. Centrelink requirement) provide support once in that job to get the one you want e.g. different job, more hours.
- Clients set the KPI’s

- DES-ESS, DES-DMS why the need for two separate services – why not one service with varying degrees of support?
- Choice of provider, not limited by postcode/suburb
- Mixed views of 13 week outcome – sometimes lose job, sometimes good incentive for DES to get outcome.
- Penalties/or incentives for going beyond 13 weeks.
- If not an interview in three months, a penalty
- A shift towards funding services for outcomes rather than numbers in the organisation, and incentives for PPS and long term tenure of employment
- DSS, other government departments and DES take on more employees themselves
- Streamline/debureaucratise system e.g. If people are on Newstart Allowance or DSP could they be fast tracked through an ESA process rather than being double handled by an overly bureaucratic system
- “IPS (individual placement support) is an integrated evidence-based model focused on the preferences and strengths of an individual – however the implementation of this model is often impeded by systemic guidelines and poor practitioner practice. Patrick McClure recommended it as a model of practice in the National Welfare Review Report.”

Government and Community Groups feedback

Five government and community group representatives participated in the focus group held on 1/4/15. Another representative provided feedback in an email.

Communication

Communication between DES, schools and training providers needs to improve

Participants had been involved in referring clients to DES or accepting referrals from DES. Generally the feedback was critical of the communication.

DES staff need more information about training before making a referral

- “DES staff referring clients to training but don’t have a good understanding of training e.g. complexity of learning options, practical completion issues, understanding impact of disability, reasonable adjustment. Student therefore doesn’t have enough information.”

Need better communication about school to work transition

- “Not very good school to work transition support/plans. LAC’s circumventing DES and going straight to schools to work with students.”
- “Tafes also going into schools and bypassing DES. Talk to students and staff about realistic options, support available at TAFE. Many schools have no idea about transitioning to work.”

Support

On the job support is important but limited by too many rules

Participants spoke positively about on the job support but were concerned that it was limited by the system:

- “Minimum eight hour/week requirement.”
- “If meet the 26 week outcome, no ongoing support to the level they need unless job in jeopardy.”

More support is needed to develop people in their work and study and help people with intellectual disability into work

Participants wanted more support with:

Finding work that uses and develops people’s skills

- “Not impressed to see people working in ADEs or elsewhere low skilled if capable to do more.”

- “Get person moving forward to a better job, more hours, more skills, not just place in job and leave them.

Transition to study and ongoing support with learning experience

- “If a DES client enrolls in a course, considered an outcome but no DES support for student. Need help with transition to study, disability related needs, increasing confidence, weaning off parents etc. If it doesn’t work out, difficult to get back into DES.”
- “In March the graduate programs for internships have to be lodged and DES can’t help because student not graduated but great lead into work. Other students doing internships and voluntary work but our guys can’t. As a result end up being underemployed.”

Finding work for people with intellectual disability

- “Less ability to advocate for themselves. Focus seems to be on people with other types of disability.”

Qualities of staff

Good staff are critical

Participants said the skill of the job support person was critical.

- “Quality of service tends to be highly dependent on the consultant/case manager.”
- “A local person with local knowledge and connections is valuable.”

They said staff needed to:

- focus on strengths
- not be blinkered about potential
- talk to students/job seekers about disclosure and when
- avoid the “tick and flick” mentality
- work with employers and reduce their fears, liaise about different types of support e.g. work place modifications
- think outside the box

High staff turnover affects service quality

They were concerned about “huge staff turnover” which meant the client might have various people involved in their support.

- “The sector has become de-skilled – lots of staff turnover, little training/expertise, demise of CRS Australia – staffed by health professionals.”
- Students had commented: “Never hear from them”; “Don’t know what’s going on”; “Consultant always changes”.

Staff need more knowledge about career options and the impact of disability

Participants said jobseekers needed accurate advice about options before they chose to go on any learning journey or career path and felt this was a gap.

- “Lack of thoroughness in exploring realistic work/study options, often resulting in a poor match e.g. what’s involved in a course, labour-market research, going beyond a person’s preferences (no consideration of aptitudes, skills, level of responsibility in a profession, the person’s needs).”

Participants also said staff needed greater knowledge about:

- the difference between intellectual disability and learning disability.
- functional impact of disability
- difference between Cert II, III and IV
- reasonable adjustment

Choice and control

Choice and control is limited by the system DES have to operate in

Participants said they had said flexibility was needed, but the government not listening. They said that jobseekers should be able to register at the DES of their choice (not based on suburb or whether you are a graduate or not) and get the support they need (not limited by hours or weeks). To not provide this was against Disability Discrimination Act (DDA).

- “DES model of employment is so rigid and inflexible. System so rule bound can’t see the individual.”

Options limited, particularly for people with intellectual disability

Participants were concerned for people with intellectual disability. They said there were no training pathways beyond Cert I or II and people were often not getting work. It was suggested that the government investing more money in ADEs showed “a lack of expectation of employment options/possibilities for people with disability”.

Collaboration

Some good examples of collaboration

Successful examples of collaboration suggested included:

- City of Stirling and LAC have done some good things re International Day of Disability and Harmony Day e.g. employer breakfast where DES provided job seeker profiles.
- CCI Partnership brokers program was very successful. Having contacts and relationships with business critical to getting employers to consider people with

disability. Knowing that money and support to get over any issues. CCI members saying we need a more diverse workforce. Did a series - think outside the box – indigenous, seniors, employ outside the box (disability).

- DSC funding a program to find jobs. 'Get Connected' is the name of the program and the focus is mainly on young people and people with intellectual disability. If long term support is needed then they get a DES involved (DES not being funded for this. The DES involved because of relationship with DSC).
- Employment Toolkit on DSC website useful.

Suggestions for a future employment support model

Suggestions included:

- A model where people develop competencies and then can be linked to an employer database.
- Job Support model (CEO - Phil Tuckerman) has been most successful in Australia at supporting people with intellectual disability.
- Perhaps KPI's should be focused on more people getting jobs not just the cream.
- Was better before (before DEEWR) – support as long as you needed, help with skill development, job development. DES KPI's sometime limit outcomes e.g. people only get the eight hour outcome when could have/want to do full time.
- Maybe need employment standards like Education and Transport. Having education standards has made it very clear to people what's expected and outcomes.
- Maybe DES could disappear when NDIS? People purchase what's needed from whom they like and set their own KPI's.
- Constant marketing to employers (like in UK) about potential of people with disability as employees. Being seen as a good employer adds value for employer.
- Barriers and misconceptions need to be broken down. Particularly those with no visible disability (mental health, autism, learning disability).
- Do more job carving – take out parts of jobs people don't want to do or no time to do.
- More universal design principles embedded into job search. How well are people really following EEO?
- More opportunities to trial different models e.g. like the DSC model or the Job Support model.

Case study – Schools group participant

Ronnie has coordinated work placements for student's with disability for many years. She has worked in collaboration with numerous disability employment services (DES). Ronnie has been disappointed with some of the new DES providers working with students at her school. "They have made no attempt to connect with us. We had a good working relationship with the previous providers."

Ronnie said there needed to be better collaboration between the school, student, family, DES and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. Local Area Coordinator) to make school to work transition easier. "Better outcomes when we work as a team". The DES could provide realistic feedback about the student's job aspirations and the employment market so that the student's goals were realistic. Ronnie said it was important for the DES to "be honest with the student and school" and set "realistic expectations". The school had valuable knowledge and experience of the student's performance in work placements. Sometimes this knowledge and experience was not valued by the DES. "They don't listen and appreciate the professional judgement of the school regarding the student's previous experience and don't value the students Individual Transition Plan." Ronnie firmly believed that with everyone working together there would be better outcomes for students.

Ronnie was also frustrated with the rules about accessing a DES. She said schools needed to be able to refer students to the DES that was best for them. In the past Ronnie had been able to refer a student based on their job interests, to a DES that she knew had strong links to employers in that sector. Similarly if a student had particular support needs she could refer them to a DES that she knew was particularly good at supporting people with those needs. Now she can only do that if the student lives in the right suburb to qualify for that DES.

Ronnie valued the on the job support provided by DES staff. She said finding work placements wasn't too hard but there wasn't enough resources to provide on the job support for all of them. Ronnie was concerned however that the DES couldn't provide support until Year 12 and argued that students needed more work experience (paid or unpaid) before then if they were to be competitive.

Case study – Government and community groups participant

Craig has extensive experience supporting students with disability in higher education. Craig and his peers have talked about the disability employment service (DES) system and believe certain factors limit the likelihood of success for students with disability.

“The DES model of employment is so rigid and inflexible. System so rule bound, can’t see the individual.”

Their principal concern is that students do not get DES support while they are studying yet would benefit from this both during their studies and in the transition to work.

“If a DES client enrolls in a course, it’s considered an outcome but there is no DES support for the student. They need help with transition to study, disability related needs, increasing confidence, weaning off parents etc.”

Craig also noted that like their fellow students, students with disability needed work experience to complement their qualification and maximise their chance of successful employment in their field of interest. Without it they were not competitive and ended up “underemployed”. Craig explained that most students at his tertiary institution applied for internships as part of their final year of study and students with disability needed support with this but the DES cannot provide this.

“In March the graduate programs for internships have to be lodged and the DES can’t help because student hasn’t graduated, but it’s a great lead into work. Other students doing internships and voluntary work but our guys can’t. As a result they end up being underemployed.”

Craig added that most students begin searching for work during the last semester of study and this was when they needed the DES support rather than waiting until they had completed their studies and become “officially unemployed”.

Craig and his peers also spoke about the knowledge and skills of DES staff. They said the skills of the job support person were critical. They said jobseekers needed accurate advice about options before they chose to go on any learning journey or career path and felt this was a gap. They believed that DES staff needed more knowledge of training, for example “complexity of learning options, practical completion issues, reasonable adjustment”; “difference between Cert II, III and IV” as well as the functional impact of different types of disabilities.

Case study – Employer group participant

Nadia has worked in the WA Public Service for 13 years. During that time she has had the opportunity to employ a number of people with disability in short term contracts. Nadia has mostly had good experiences with the disability employment services (DES) that have supported job applicants. The communication has been “excellent” and she has been impressed with their commitment to the success of the employee. She valued that the DES supported the person to be independent but were readily available if there were any problems.

“Been good at getting them connected and supported at work so they can wean off. Help them increase skills, improve communication, be more confident so can be independent and know that the DES support available if need – just phone.”

Nadia noted that good DES staff would also develop the skills of the supervisors to support people with disability because this was not a skill that all supervisors had.

Nadia was disappointed with one DES. They didn’t communicate as well with the employer or the employee.

“Didn’t follow up with the employee, said they couldn’t schedule meetings/support – just dropped in when it suited them”.

Fortunately Nadia had a good relationship with another DES so was able to introduce the employee to them and they were able to provide better support for both the employee and the employer.

“Previous service didn’t understand her disability. Other DES instead knows the person more and much better outcome for her once they were involved.”

Nadia said it would be helpful to have more information about the job seeker “warts and all” before they were placed including the impact of the person’s disability on their work, not just the “label”. She also said that DES could provide better job preparation e.g. Job Clubs for people where they learn the expectations of work, and make better use of traineeships.

Case study - Consumer group participant

Lakshmi is a psychology graduate who is currently employed as a manager at a service for people with disability. Lakshmi grew up in a supportive family and community environment and always wanted to give something back to the community. She noticed the inequitable treatment of people from minority groups and chose to direct her energies into breaking down barriers for people with disability from non-English speaking backgrounds. She chose her professional career path carefully to reflect her skills and interests so she could be more effective in making positive systemic changes.

Lakshmi is blind and thought the services of a disability employment service (DES) would help her find suitable professional work. The DES she first registered with “did nothing” and after several years told her she was “too hard” because she wanted a professional job. Lakshmi learned from that experience and took more of a lead with the second agency she registered with. She told them at the start exactly what support she wanted from them to help her find work and what she could do for herself. She said “I told them I wanted them to read through my responses to selection criteria and my cover letters, for formatting, spelling or any other suggestions. I also wanted them to job search on Seek and other job search engines.” Lakshmi didn’t want or need support during the job interviews but the DES was adamant that they wanted to attend her interviews so as a compromise Lakshmi said they could wait outside while she went in on her own.

Lakshmi was successful in finding professional employment (she is now into her third professional role) however the DES then insisted on providing support to her “as if I had an intellectual disability and needed them all day with me” which was unnecessary and disrespectful of her skills and individual needs and preferences.

Lakshmi says the DES “should treat each individual according to the person’s needs and not put everyone in one basket”.

Case study – Client group participant

Jody was struggling to cope at work and realising she was both physically and mentally unwell decided to quit her job. Jody's family tried to support her but they couldn't understand what she was going through. Soon after Jody had a major breakdown and was admitted into Graylands Hospital. After some time in hospital Jody returned home but she felt like the "wiring in your head was not the same and just putting one foot in front of the other was a challenge".

After a couple of years Jody wanted to get back into work and started with some casual work but found it difficult to cope. She decided to try voluntary work and found it a good way to build up her skills and confidence and get back into the routine of working and mixing with colleagues.

Through volunteering Jody was able to use her skills to set up a library for a disability service and do some cataloguing and administration for a museum. She felt good about this. "I felt useful. They were so grateful." Jody knew she could do more so she started applying for paid work but found she was "hopeless" in interviews. She approached one disability employment service (DES) but they weren't interested because her work was voluntary and she wasn't looking for enough paid hours per week. A friend recommended another DES and they were happy to assist. The employment support person helped Jody with her presentation for interviews and supported her during interviews. Jody however was struggling to demonstrate her work skills with so little relevant and recent work history. She was feeling very frustrated with her lack of success so the support person approached an employer Jody was interested in working with and asked about a voluntary role. Jody started in the role and was able to demonstrate that she was capable and was then offered a 12 month contract. The hours of paid work (15/fortnight) are not enough to be an outcome for the DES but they have continued to support Jody.

Jody says the slow transition through voluntary work to more hours and more responsibility was critical to her success.

"Biggest challenge is raising your confidence after you haven't been well. Support person gave me heaps of encouragement....I needed that support in volunteering, being a contributor, gaining confidence."

So too was the encouragement and ongoing support of her employment support person. "With mental health can get paranoid, poor social skills/understanding so can use my DES staff as a filter to 'interpret' reality and give me suggestions how to handle things."