

National Disability Employment Framework – Issues Paper

Key Employment (DES, Head Office Coffs Harbour, NSW) Response

The philosophy that underpins the suggested changes to the Disability Employment Services framework are definitely supported by Key Employment. We would advocate strongly for a model based on choice and control of an individual. We believe we would perform well in a market-based model and particularly agree with a whole-of-life, integrated and flexible approach for jobseekers.

We do however have some concerns relating to assessment, choice and youth.

Assessment

How an individual is assessed for funding would be so critical to the services offered. The ESAt assessment is one of our biggest concerns with the current DES model. Issues with this process include:

- ESAt appointments are conducted in 15 minute windows, often over the phone and only take into consideration documented medical conditions.
- ESAt assessors are unable to investigate or assess for any further conditions. Because of this over 400 000 people with disability are serviced in the JSA (Job Active) contract and not with a disability service. Given the DES program performs significantly better than JSA providers with this cohort it is concerning so many people are referred to the wrong program because they did not have the right paperwork at the time of assessment.
- Barriers such as drug use, homelessness, long-term unemployment and education level do not play a large enough part in determining funding level.
- Currently we are able to use the funding we get as needed regardless of the individual's funding level. This often means that we spend much more on a funding level 1 jobseeker who has been unemployed for a number of years than we do on a funding level 2 jobseeker who gains employment quickly. Essentially, the profit we make from Client A (funding level 2) is often spent on Client B (funding level 1). If each person is going to come into our service with specific funding for themselves then this relies on a current process which almost always assesses people inaccurately. A 15 minute phone appointment, viewing one doctor's report which lists a person's medical conditions only, will not be adequate and we fear that we will be unable to support people properly.

Choice of service provider

The philosophy that stresses individual choice can also only work in a model where there are many choices for a participant. In the past there seemed to be a trend of cutting down the number of service providers, with larger companies getting more and more business and smaller services disappearing. If you are advocating for choice you must ensure there still is choice.

Pathways for youth

We would like to see better pathways for youth with disability into a disability employment model. Currently a youth with disability (that it is not severe enough to qualify them for a support unit or special school) cannot be serviced by a DES provider until they have left school completely. This

often leads to students leaving school early to seek out employment service support. Youth with disability are missing out on after-school jobs and the transition from school to work in general for youth with disability is very poorly managed. There needs to be some recognition that there is a cohort of young people aged 14-18 who, due to their disability and significant other disadvantages and barriers, are not suitable for the education system, who do not attend school and who essentially mark time until they can apply for a government benefit. With the right support, which is geared towards employment, these same young people can thrive. If intervention is early enough we can support a whole generation of young people into employment before they even have an option to walk into a Centrelink office. Disability employment providers are in an excellent position to work with this group with the best providers (like us) already having excellent links with their school communities.

Issues Paper Questions

Workforce participation of people with disability

What can improve employment outcomes for people with disability?

- More employer engagement and awareness: a national marketing campaign for the benefits of hiring people with disability. Don't always use jobseekers with a "visible" disability as this perpetuates the stereotypes.
- Talk about the strengths people with disability bring, not what they can't do.
- Make DES more flexible to meet the needs of the person. It is too prescriptive at the moment.
- Increased wage subsidies to entice particularly small to medium businesses to give people with disability an opportunity.
- Not making DES so focused on turnover and volume of placements rather the quality of service.
- Increase job satisfaction and job suitability of participants.

What can help reduce barriers for people with disability seeking employment?

- Having a co-ordinated approach between services: people with disability face many more challenges and have to co-ordinate carers, doctor's appointments, transportation, day programs etc.
- Better infrastructure and support in regional areas e.g. transport is a major barrier to employment.
- Don't focus on people with disability. If you work out what will reduce the barriers for all people seeking employment then this will flow to people with disability. A lot of the issues facing people are the same.
- Better support from other services e.g. mental health, drug and alcohol. Much of the time this limited support affects the chances of employment most.

What can help reduce barriers for employers hiring people with disability?

- Increased subsidies to entice particularly small to medium businesses to give people with disability an opportunity.
- Tax breaks to employers who employ a diverse workforce.

- Government to take the lead and hire more people with disability and promote it.
- Offering flexible and innovative solutions to employers to help the person to be most productive. Particularly with episodic conditions. DES doesn't always allow for this currently.
- Take into account the increase in casual employment and the effects of increased benchmark hours on available part-time hours for a small employer.
- Allow work trials or work experience without penalty of available funding.

How can we promote the benefits of hiring people with disability?

- Government to take the lead and hire more people with disability and promote it.
- National marketing campaign. Has there ever been a national push to promote this?
- Case studies. Employer opinions need to change. They need real examples to be able to see this.
- Information sheets to give to employers, provided by Government, highlighting the benefits.

Principles for changes to DES

Do you agree with these as the underlying set of principles for change?

- Yes

Are there other principles you would include?

- There needs to be a focus on youth so that young people get the working habit early and it stops the cycle.
- There needs to be a focus on overcoming disadvantage as well as disability. A lot of the time these things go hand in hand but we can focus on the disability and not the disadvantage.
- Focus on the cohort who aren't NDIS eligible or who traditionally aren't as high support; people diagnosed with ADD/ODD/Learning disability/Intellectual disability (not at the level to get DSP). Many of these jobseekers aren't given enough support early or are not diagnosed early so don't get the support needed and don't appear in DES until later in life.

Current services overview

How effective are pathways into these services?

- Not very. There are too many hurdles to access these services. It should be easy for people on DSP to access DES support but it is a hard process. They may have to see a doctor, see Centrelink for an ESA before coming to a DES provider. Many jobseekers are put off by this process and don't register. Also a lot of jobseekers are scared of Centrelink and so won't go to see them. Lots of scaremongering about benefits etc. put people off.
- Assessments are often inaccurate and don't reflect the true support needs of individuals. What program is appropriate and what is the program to achieve (employment at a certain number of benchmark hours)?

How well do these programmes work together to support people with disability throughout their life course, including for conditions episodic in nature?

- Not very. There needs to be capacity for early intervention and identification to help people throughout their life. There needs to be a focus on working with schools to make sure people don't fall through the cracks at an early age.
- Much of the time an Employment Consultant ends up doing the job of a social worker as there are no other services to help or the employment service provider is the only one linked to the jobseeker's benefits so they feel a connection there.

Are there other services which could assist people with disability to find a job?

- Yes.

What scope is there to move employment services to an individualised funding model?

- Within the NDIS there is much scope. However, for those people that don't qualify for NDIS, or even DSP, but still need the individualised support a DES can offer, there is not as much scope. Particularly if it is linked to receiving benefits.

Employment services in context

How can elements of the disability support system better link with employment support to improve employment outcomes for people with disability?

- There needs to be a more holistic approach. Services often work independently, currently.
- There is a fragmented funding approach and not one person to know all the services and supports on offer. Maybe a regional disability-specific support worker to work with all local schools to inform them of services. This was a career counsellor previously but it needs to be more specialised.

Are there contextual factors of the jobseeker that should be considered?

- Family, area, work history, transport, living arrangements etc.

DES

How can DES providers better assist people with disability to prepare for and find a job?

- Reduced caseloads would allow for more necessary support.

How can DES providers better support people with disability in the workplace?

- Increased flexibility used to support those people who need it most. Also more funding to allow those people to be best supported.

How can DES providers better support employers?

- Disability awareness training (avoiding stereotyping, though).

How can the employment service model be improved to help providers deliver better support?

- Less red tape.
- More flexibility.

- Less focus on short-term and more on career and holistic approach, whilst also rewarding the gateway job. No scope for this at the moment.
- Less prescription.
- More time and funding.
- Integrate DES-ESS and DES-DMS models or talk about a rehab service as a differential.

Does DES need to be redesigned to operate in NDIS environment?

- Yes but any redesign also needs to take into account the people with disability who aren't eligible for NDIS. In some ways they need more support and definitely need the individualised nature of DES.

JSA

How can JSA providers better assist people with disability to prepare and find a job?

- Participants shouldn't be going to JSA as they aren't specialised enough and don't have enough time to provide the necessary individualised support. Participants should go to DES. Why have a program supporting people with disability when it isn't designed to do so and only has a success rate of 19% compared to 35% in DES? Also a terrible retention rate of 42% to 13 week outcome and 28% to 26 week outcome.

How can JSA providers better support people with disability in the workplace?

- By supporting them and staying in regular contact with the participant and employer.

How can JSA providers better support employers and respond to employer needs?

- There is too much focus on immediate placements which doesn't allow JSAs to focus on the bigger picture of training people for the jobs of the future.
- They need to liaise with employers more.
- Employers view JSAs negatively as they think jobseekers are only going there because they have to, not because they want to find work.
- All the focus is on compliance.

How do you think the proposed changes will improve the JSA model and employment outcomes for people with disability?

- It won't. Work for the Dole has proven it doesn't work, particularly for people with disability. Jobseekers will be forced to perform work that may not suit them or they may not be capable of doing, which will lead to more annoyance with the system and more barriers.

ADEs

Can we improve support for people moving out of ADEs into open employment?

- Yes. One good step already is allowing people to access DES and ADEs at the same time.

How can ADEs operate as viable businesses?

- Unsure

Support for Employers

Are employers aware of these supports?

- Some are. It depends on the work of the local DES. On a larger scale, no. A national marketing campaign is needed to promote the available supports.

How can supports help achieve long term employment for people with disability?

Are the support needs of large employers different to the support needs of small employers?

- Absolutely but large employers often shy away from using DES as providers can't supply the volume of workforce required or cover the same geographical areas as the employer.

How can we encourage more engagement between employers and people with disability?

- It needs to happen on a national scale e.g. APS to take the lead by employing more people with disability. It could be a large employer e.g. Woollies or Coles to act as Champion.

What other supports or approaches could increase employment participation of people with disability?

- Champion.

NDIS

In what way do you think the NDIS can support employment outcomes for people with disability?

- By taking the whole-of-life approach it will allow the person to be best placed to work.

What do you think we can learn from the NDIS to improve job services for people with disability?

- What is the priority for people with disability?
- What will they spend their funding on to assist them to get prepared for work?

PHAMs

What more can be done to assist people with mental illness to find a job?

- Much of the focus is on those who are severely affected. We need to also help those who aren't severely affected yet and assist them so they don't become severely affected. This would make it easier and also reduce funding.

What more can be done to support people with mental illness in the workplace?

- Allow for more flexibility. Give less prescription on what is support. Sometimes having a 'chat' and offloading information is support to the participant and that needs to be recognised. People with mental illness often don't have anyone else to talk to.

Life course and diversity

Are there particular milestones which have a positive impact on employment prospects for people with disability?

- Training and qualification accomplishments.
- Gaining driving licence.

What issues need to be considered in relation to specific groups of people with disability?

- A need to address the common barriers to specific groups to tailor support more appropriately, without stereotyping.

What approaches work with the different groups and these different issues?