



**Submission to:
Disability Employment Services
Reform 2018**

**RE: New Disability Employment Services
from 2018 Discussion Paper**

**From: Australian Society of Rehabilitation
Counsellors (ASORC)**

**Submission addressed to:
Disability Employment Services Reform 2018
GPO Box 9820
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Introduction

ASORC is the peak professional body representing rehabilitation counsellors throughout Australasia. Established in 1976, ASORC is a non-party political, non-sectarian and not for profit organisation. The Mission of ASORC is to promote the profession of rehabilitation counselling and to foster the professional capability of members.

Rehabilitation Counsellors are Allied Health Professionals who work within a counselling and case management framework to assist people who are experiencing disability, a health condition or social disadvantage to participate in employment or education, or to live independently and access services in the community.

ASORC provides:

- A long standing and respected voice for the profession (over 30 years since inception).
- Resources, education, mentoring and supervision necessary for members to achieve career advancement and enhanced credibility in the profession and in the community.
- Access to latest research and academic commentary through the ASORC ® Journal (AJRC).
- Access to a network of similarly skilled and minded professionals across Australia.

We are pleased to provide our submission and have chosen to provide responses against selected questions that relate to the profession of Rehabilitation Counselling.

Questions for consideration

Chapter 3: Improving Participant Choice and Control

Discussion Point 1: More Choice for Participants

General comment: ASORC supports greater participant choice and control over services primarily on the basis that Rehabilitation Counselling is focused on a person centred approach and this change will enable service delivery to be participant-focused. Careful consideration will need to be given to how funding will follow participants. It is important that the cost of service delivery by skilled providers is not compromised should participants choose to change providers as a result of dissatisfaction arising from being challenged to move forward towards employment (which is the objective of the program) and not a result of poor service delivery. This is of particular concern with participants who have a requirement to participate (and represent the majority of the current DES client pool).

Chapter 4: Driving greater competition and contestability in the delivery of DES

Discussion Point 6: Entering the DES Market

1. What should the basic criteria be for joining the Panel?

In regard to the suggested DES provider Panel members meeting certain criteria (p 31) such as; "A demonstrated ability to deliver disability, employment or related services"; ASORC would encourage any staff management principles to include minimum qualifications for staff, relevant to the work undertaken and expected outcomes.

Quality and consistency in service delivery will be enhanced if there is a minimum standard of staff management principles such as those outlined by the Heads of Workers' Compensation Authorities Australia and New Zealand (<http://www.hwca.org.au/nationally-consistent-approval-framework-workplace-rehabilitation-providers/>) and the NDIS professional qualification for Rehabilitation Counsellors (<https://www.ndis.gov.au/medias/Module-4-Guide-to-Suitability-PDF>).

ASORC, as the peak National body representing Rehabilitation Counsellors, ensures consistent core competencies for ASORC membership categories to facilitate qualification verification through membership categories as well as ongoing professional development relevant to the sector through its' ASORC National Professional development Program. <https://www.asorc.org.au/education/asorc-2016-pd-program>

Chapter 6: Improved Gateway and Assessment Process

Discussion Point 17: Assessments Review

1. What other aspects of ESAts/JCAs should be examined in the review?

ASORC agrees that the reliability and validity of assessments are fundamental to ensuring the right people end up in the right employment service at the right funding level. ASORC supports the proposed review of current assessment processes in two parts as outlined in the discussion paper.

With regards to the review of international literature, ASORC publishes the Australian Journal of Rehabilitation Counselling (AJRC) with publisher Cambridge University Press. The journal contains original contributions dealing with a broad range of topics related to rehabilitation and disability, including original scientific research. Copies can be provided for review purposes if requested. Website link: <http://www.asorc.org.au/resources/asorc-journal-2>

ASORC has an established Academic Reference Group comprised of our accredited tertiary course providers, to ensure a best practice approach to Rehabilitation Counselling continues to have currency within the Australian and International contexts. As academic leaders in the field of Rehabilitation Counselling, the group remain up to date with international best practice, to ensure graduates within the field of Rehabilitation Counselling are fully informed and have appropriate disability knowledge.

ASORC would value further discussion related to how this Academic reference group may contribute to the planned review and ensure a supply of qualified professionals for future service delivery.

Rehabilitation Counsellors specialise in Vocational Assessments, and are subject matter experts within this field. There are various formats of vocational assessments within the marketplace, they are designed to focus on abilities and existing transferable skills which can be mapped across a broad range of employment, training and community related activities. It is essential that assessments can be personalised and tailored to individuals to maximise their effectiveness. Enabling Assessors to undertake enhanced assessments, including psychometric testing and vocational counselling may limit the need of service providers to perform their own initial assessments which may be undertaken up to three times per year if participants frequently change provider. Investing initial resources in evidence based assessments may mitigate the risk of funds being continually re-directed into assessments, as opposed to interventions. The key elements of a vocational assessment are consideration of a person's transferable skills, capacity, retraining abilities / requirements, interests and the labour market. Through the process of individualised vocational counselling suitable vocational options are identified. Rehabilitation counsellors utilise both motivational interviewing and solution focused therapy as well as adjustment counselling to assist participants and assessors to identify suitable vocational options.

In examining the current assessment reports for the purposes of identifying opportunities for improvement, we would encourage extensive consideration of Vocational Assessment tools to ensure a focus on open labour market options and interests of clients. In line with the assessment tool review, consideration of professional competencies of assessors would be highly valuable. The core competencies by which ASORC full members are accredited can be provided upon request. Website link: <http://www.asorc.org.au/resources/asorc-core-competencies>

Considerations should also be given to the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) framework. ICF is the World Health Organisation (WHO) framework for measuring health and disability at both individual and population levels.

ASORC has recently promoted to its members training based on the Progressive Goal Attainment Program (PGAP). This well researched program may be valuable to include in any review of evidence based assessments. Website link: <https://www.pgapworks.com/en/index.php>

2. Should there be:

- a. greater separation of ESAts and provider's own assessments, with ESAts focused on eligibility, work capacity and appropriate referral within DES and not extending to suggested interventions?**

ASORC supports ESAts/JCAs having a strong vocational focus encompassing transferable skills which identify abilities as opposed to medical restrictions. Vocational assessment should form part of the ESAts/JCA assessment, undertaken by appropriately qualified practitioners, in order to guide referral to service providers for interventions.

- b. should ESAts be developed and extended to provide more and better information on which providers could base their assistance, with less need to perform their own assessments?**

ASORC would support any newly established assessments being fulsome and holistic with a focus on further information to support service provider intervention as opposed to an assessment with a sole focus on work capacity for referral.

3. How should the revised assessment process fit with other options for DES reforms outlined in this Discussion Paper?

Discussion point 1 considers increasing participant choice and control in the accessed services. Assessments which are fulsome, holistic and considered in the context of a counselling / person centred model, should mitigate the need for new, similar assessments to be undertaken if participants choose to move service providers. Enabling service providers to undertake enhanced assessments, for example, psychometric testing or language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) assessments, may limit the need for service providers to perform their own initial capacity assessments which could potentially be undertaken up to three times per year if participants frequently change provider. Investing initial resources in evidence based assessments may mitigate the risk of funds being continually re-directed into assessments, as opposed to interventions.

Chapter 8: Building Employer Demand

Other suggestions include:

- setting employment targets in the public service at Commonwealth, state and territory and local government levels
- tracking students with disabilities after completion of school to determine how their funding and level of education translated to training and employment
- enabling students and graduates with disabilities to apply for equity-based programs that get people with disabilities into graduate jobs, akin to Indigenous cadetships
- immediately releasing 100–500 jobs to people with disabilities, through pilot programs, apprenticeships and training.

Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003, *Disability, Ageing and Carers: summary of findings*, cat. no. 4430.0, ABS, Canberra.

<https://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/disability-and-carers/publications-articles/policy-research/shut-out-the-experience-of-people-with-disabilities-and-their-families-in-australia?HTML#2.4>