**About Jobfind**



Jobfind is a division of the Angus Knight Group of companies. We are a proactive and dynamic organisation that places strong emphasis on provision of a fully integrated service delivery model to enhance employment outcomes for job seekers.

Integral to our approach is a recognition that success comes from genuine understanding of our job seekers and their needs, their communities and employers. All elements are critical to the sustained success of our model.

Jobfind currently offers DES in 13 locations. We have a proud history of assisting vulnerable and disadvantaged job seekers into employment. In addition to our DES clientele, we have a number of contracts for CDP, assisting Indigenous Australians to gain the skills they need to secure sustainable employment. Jobfind would welcome the opportunity to further expand our DES business from 2018, enabling us to assist more people with disabilities into employment.

**Introduction**

Jobfind welcomes the opportunity to inform the discussion on the new disability employment services.

The following submission presents Jobfind’s overall position in response to the Discussion Paper recently released by the Department of Social Services, titled New Disability Employment Services from 2018.

Employment is something that many of us take for granted. Yet too many Australians living with disability feel they are excluded from the employment market. Employment boosts social wellbeing, and provides a feeling of inclusiveness in society. Where people feel excluded from work, they may feel more excluded from society as a whole.

With the participation rate for people with disability languishing around 53%, it is critical that Government funded programmes provide real and targeted assistance, to help more people into employment.

We appreciate this opportunity to provide comment on the discussion paper, and have targeted our response on a number of the discussion points, aimed to ensure a more targeted, better service into the future.

**The Model**

**Participant Choice:**

Jobfind supports change in the industry to ensure the right of Participants to choose their own Provider and take control of their career paths and life plans. Proper access to the right funding options for skills training as well as the ability for the Participant to develop their own Job Plan and negotiate appropriate wage subsides are essential in moving towards an outcomes based system.

However, whilst Jobfind supports the right of an individual to pick their own provider, we believe more consideration of the potential impacts on industry is required. Without the proper qualitative measures in place there could be a detrimental impact on the industry and its ability to provide the best possible service for its customers. Here we believe having a minimum duration of service before allowing transition of Participants, and having an annual cap on the number of provider transfers per participant, to enable the Participant and Provider time to establish a relationship, and to provide a genuine opportunity for job search support.

In addition, we also recommend maintaining some form of restriction on caseload percentage, to maintain provider viability.

**Funding Model**

Jobfind unequivocally supports an outcomes based model that has less administrative burden on Providers and more incentive for longer-term outcomes such as a 52 week outcome payment. A simple reduction in Service Fees and more emphasis on speed to placement and payments for long-term success such as the UK Work Programme model is favoured.

**Provider Panel**

Whilst acknowledging there are some benefits of a panel to decrease the cost of tendering to providers, and ensuring small providers are not excluded from the market, Jobfind retains a number of concerns**.**

Specifically, our key concern is that it may be detrimental to provider viability if no consideration is given to the maximum number of providers able to operate within any one employment region. The case is yet to be made for this proposed model, and it would require rigorous checking and assessment prior to rollout.

If there is to be an uncapped provider market or limited restrictions placed on new providers then we believe this would result in the lowering of standards in the industry with a dilution of skills and an inequitable playing field for job seekers. This is counter-intuitive, given the extensive time spent for the industry on developing great knowledge and experience.

Instead, they risk being replaced by organisations with less knowledge but capacity to deliver stronger advertising campaigns and promotional offers but may potentially be lacking the skills to assist some of society’s most vulnerable people with their career and life aspirations.

Instead, our preferred recommendation is to maintain current competitive tendering arrangements. To improve the servicing and outcomes of Participants we support changes to certain payment points in the existing model. This would help the Department ensure better qualitative outcomes without adopting the significant risk that comes when introducing an untried model.

Jobfind recommends an approach, which will ensure the expertise of current industry providers is enhanced and not diluted. Any move to bring in substantial new and untried Providers just heightens the risk for Participants in getting the assistance tailored to meet their requirements.

**Maintaining Integrity of the System**

When supporting some of the most vulnerable people in Australian society, it is vital that we have appropriate safeguards in place to ensure the integrity of the system. We cite the significant issues identified with the Australian Government Training Industry, namely VET Fee-Help and the incentives offered to entice Participants to undertake study. The flaws of this approach have been revealed and the end result is a tarnished industry that will require years to rebuild their reputation. Rogue Providers have taken advantage of people whom the process should protect. Another example would be the Pink Batts strategy as examples of what may occur if there is a complete free-for-all within the market and any Provider can enter without verification and quality controls.

**Relaxing the market share concept**

As stated, Jobfind supports a competitive tendering process to determine who is best to deliver services to different cohort groups. These Providers must then be held to account for service quality and outcomes. If there is no minimum guarantee of clients this may result in lower levels of service and create unviable businesses. We believe it is vital that there needs to be sustainable market shares. Providers who are in aligned business areas will immediately feel that they can deliver services to the level and quality proven industry Providers have for the last 10 years.

For many years now the results of past tender activities has seen the number of Providers diminish significantly. This is a clear demonstration that the system works, with best Providers being retained and their service delivery models have been improved along the way. This process of continuous improvement will be totally diminished if the current “uncapped” model for market share is implemented. Jobfind wishes to discourage the Department from going down this path until there is clear evidence to suggest widespread opening of the market to new Providers will guarantee better services and outcomes.

Jobfind recommends further, extensive discussion on the methodology the department would use to select Providers.

**Better Employment Engagement Strategies**

Jobfind believes that the engagement of employers has been a real weakness of both providers and Government in this space since its inception.

Some Provider and individuals have better models in place, but as an industry there is need for more thought and better sales/ business development practices when dealing with the corporate sector.

There is a real concern that the stats presented in the discussion paper highlight a decline in people with disabilities getting jobs. Ultimately, we believe this has been impacted by the way DES and jobactive providers engage with and relate to employers.

Too often the problem is in understanding the needs of business and what they require from an employee.

This does not necessarily require a more innovative approach, but it does highlight the need to understand what employers are looking for in a new hire.

We cite the following poor practices of the industry that have had detrimental impacts on employer engagement over the years:

* Poor job matching to an employers’ job specifications.This can be particularly detrimental if this is an employer’s first foray into using a DES provider. This can ‘scar’ an employer from using a DES provider in the future. Therefore more thought needs to go into the first contact of an employer especially in its initial employment of a DES client.
* Once credibility has been established then there is greater likelihood the employer will overlook a future mistake or be inclined to take a ‘risk’ to give someone with perhaps a more severe disability an opportunity.
* If the experience continues to be a negative one then that employer will be difficult to convince down the track about employing someone with a disability.
* The lack of strategy as an industry as a whole about how employers are contacted/communicated. Many providers have telephone ‘cold calling’ days, many employers are being contacted by numerous providers every day. This would be worse without the employment regions system.
* Many of the people doing the calling have very limited sales skills which can have a detrimental effect on the image of the whole industry, let alone a provider that targets the same person in the same organisation because of poor internal communication procedures.
* The Government ESS system means that there isn’t an adequate CRM tool for Employer engagement, therefore if providers wish to purchase a CRM then there is a requirement for double entry of information. This is very onerous for a caseworker, who instead could be spending this time canvassing for jobs for their clients.
* There aren’t many providers that have the sales process down from start to finish, that is from initial contact via telephone cold call to how they keep engaging employers through technology e-commerce, personal contact through to post placement support.
* If we look at the way many organisations use technology E-Commerce extremely well now to maintain a relationship with its customers eg Woolworths E commerce
* The Transient nature of employment (staff turnover issues) in this industry and lack of record keeping means if a provider employee leaves an organisation the employer can lose contact with the industry. This employer may have been still keen to employ people with disabilities, but have now lost contact.
* Generally Employment Consultant positions aren’t always conducive to getting the best sales people, they probably don’t pay enough to get a sales person at the top of their game and the industry lacks some glamour. Hence it is difficult to recruit the right sales people.
* The image of what a disability is: When most employers think employing someone with a disability they generally think of a physical disability, but as we know this is only a small proportion of the DES portfolio. Therefore, more communication is needed from the Industry and Government about what constitutes disabilities.
* More research and information needs to be generated by the Industry/Government with regard to the benefits of employing people with disabilities, we need to expand the selling points.
* There should be a structure and incentives around Providers working together to deliver outcomes from larger employers who have national footprints.
* The Government needs to look closely at companies and business models that aren’t being community minded with respect to employing people with disabilities. We site Aldi as an organisation that employs very few Australians and very few people with disabilities. its low cost business structure is putting pressure on Coles and Woolworths to change their business models which would have impact on their Disability employment strategies
* In conclusion at the recent DES Leaders forum the least popular discussion group was the employer engagement one which may help to illustrate a level of apathy with regard to this aspect of the Industry.

**Jobfind Supports**

* Further Participant, community and employer consultation
* Maintaining Service fees, to help support the provision of training and education required to get many people with disabilities job ready
* Continuation of wage and Training subsidies
* Commitment to enhancement of industry knowledge and professionalism
* Diversity in the Provider market e.g. a balance of for profit, and not for profit, and the inclusion of specialists

A much enhanced focus on employer engagement

**In addition, Jobfind acknowledges the following**

* We support NESA’s comments that the current process should be reformed. We support the amalgamation of ESS and DSS into one Contract
* We believe the gateway process is too bureaucratic. It needs a full review and complete overhaul
* We support a shift from the current employment regions concept to regions that mirror those used for jobactive
* There is much needed improvement in the initial assessment process for job seekers
* We support more detailed Job Plans, as long as they focus on the individuals’ employment process and are not merely an administrative tool
* There is an important place for face-to-face contact with our job seekers. The social contact element is very important especially in keeping people with job seekers engaged motivated
* In recognition of the changing nature of the employment market, with increasing part time and short term contracts, we believe there shouldn’t be any limits to 4 week outcomes. Even short term contracts can have significant benefits for unemployed people, helping boost their future employability.

**Other comments**

As an organisation we have extensive experience in supporting Indigenous Australians, and recognise that there are often additional barriers to employment faced by many in rural and remote Australia.

However, it is disappointing to note there is no reference to DES in remote and rural areas in the Discussion paper.

We would be keen to see this addressed in upcoming discussions with the Department.

**Conclusion:**

Significant resources are allocated towards programmes to support Australians into employment. Integral to the success of these programmes is their design.

We appreciate the Department of Social Services allowing the opportunity to share our views on the future of disability employment services and play a role in helping design a model best suited to support people with disabilities into employment.

We strongly support keeping a competitive tender model, as we believe this will best support the viability and quality of the sector. We are in favour of a funding model that recognises speed to placement, and sustainability of employment. We also advocate strongly for enhanced employer engagement, as this will only seek to improve employment outcomes for our Participants.

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