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| ADJ Consultancy Services |
| To: | Department of Social Services, New Disability EmploymentServices from 2018 - **DISCUSSION PAPER** |
| From: | Adam Johnston, Proprietor, ADJ Consultancy Services |
| Date: | 12th December 2016 |
| Re: | Submission on The Discussion Paper  |

Dear Sir,

I write this submission with one big question in mind – why? Why are we continuing to thrash around with a DES System which fundamentally does not work? We know it does not work because few employers use it.[[1]](#footnote-1) Furthermore, have not a range of promises been made before, about more control, more choice, and better outcomes for older workers and those with disabilities.[[2]](#footnote-2)

In my own case, I am a disability pensioner, who with the good fortune of winning a scholarship, returned to study. Had one been fully aware of just how few employers use DES, it would have been advisable to abandon my Voluntary Activity Agreement with a provider long before I did. Notably the Department never readily conceded these figures and, one thought (or rather assumed) that the NGO agencies had access to a vast array of employers.

Certainly, one agent was very apt at telling me, with a disturbing amount of earnest believability how he was promoting my credentials to his “contacts.” Over a series of months, the campaign-style enthusiasm never waned, but my impatience grew, as promised interviews and other meetings never materialised and, the goose that was going to lay the golden egg became the employment turkey who brought me a range of broken promises, long winded explanations, and plain excuses; all billed to the Australian taxpayer. The most annoying part was that ‘the Australian taxpayer’ sometimes included me. While the DES turkeys flapped about claiming to be helping me find work, I had actually obtained the odd bit of contract or consultancy work myself. This was of course, by no means reliable or consistent, though throughout it all my DES agent continued to receive payment for spectacular non-performance.

One has had three agents during my time with the DES system; none have been truly noteworthy for their competence and, only one can claim any real credit for securing me a paid (temporary) job many years ago. My point is this: it does not really matter how much choice you give end users; if the same insipid NGO ‘providers’ populate your new scheme (many of whom would struggle to meet any test of gainful employment themselves[[3]](#footnote-3)) you will find yourself facing another review in quick time.

A foundational question that should be ask is should the Government fund a DES system at all? Equally, how well does all this alleged support and monitoring measure up when it comes to actual outcomes? Would much of it survive a cost/benefit analysis? In my experience, the DES would not rate well; even when it does find people with disabilities work, those most needy in our community (and most deserving of public protection) seem to be most often exploited by Disability Business Enterprises (DBEs).[[4]](#footnote-4) Yet, the Commonwealth Government continues to fund DBEs, even after adverse High Court findings. This tells you just how much (or little) our Government thinks of those with disabilities, that it believes it acceptable for organisations to continue paying wages found to be discriminatory.

Work should put people in a better position than unemployment. The above example of DBEs shows it does not. Even when you can enter open employment, the job market does not necessarily advance you either. I must consider impacts on my health, especially as I get older; cerebral palsy is not kind to the middle-aged human body. As such, issues including access to subsidized medicine are also important. However, in short, one has raised these and other matters before, in numerous prior inquiries regarding the DES and unemployment more generally.[[5]](#footnote-5) I have also raised questions around the dubious nature of many training programs the DES system refers clients to,[[6]](#footnote-6) with limited success.

In conclusion, it would be better to wind-up the DES, as both a budget saving and, before it come harm too many more people. I certainly have wasted much time and money following up on non-existent DES job placements. Others have been distinctly pro-bono, while I have been lied to, exploited, and seen the most manipulative side of human nature. I would counsel anyone against using the DES or VET systems; it has also completed changed my view of NGOs, who should no longer be subsidized by government or receive tax concessions.[[7]](#footnote-7)

For my part, when my former DES provider sent me a letter about a Centrelink assessment which was timed to see me travelling by taxi in the morning peak (with no offer by anyone to meet the cost) this was the ‘straw that broke the DES camel’s back’. I complained to the Department, who agreed that as the contract was voluntary, as I was studying (universities having their own employment consultants) and as I was not under a mutual obligation scheme, one did not need to stay under the DES umbrella.

I recommend anyone who can, to leave the DES system. My departure has led me to a notable reduction in stress, reporting obligations and, ended the need to keep vast arrays of documents, be this on-line or on paper. Next to none of this activity could be attributed to securing gainful employment. And to be fair to my hapless turkey of a provider, he can probably make exactly the same claims as a result of my absence.

Yours faithfully,



Adam Johnston



1. Employment and Disability: a complex problem with no simple solution, Dr George Taleporos Ramp Up 13 Jan 2014, <http://www.abc.net.au/rampup/articles/2014/01/13/3922428.htm> as at 11th December 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See e.g.: Five billion dollar employment services scheme to be unveiled today, Naomi Woodley reported this story on Monday, July 28, 2014 08:17:28, <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2014/s4055036.htm> as at 11 December 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See: An inquiry into the Social Security Legislation Amendment (Strengthening the Job Seeker Compliance Framework) Bill 2014,.Submission 12, <http://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=b0e07f8c-3f2b-43f0-b6de-3e7f0ceaf38e&subId=301892> as at 11 December 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See e.g.: Disability services warn rise in supported workshop wages untenable, Joanna Crothers reported this story on Friday, December 9, 2016 08:20:00, <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2016/s4589635.htm> as at 12th December 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See my submission to the Human Rights Commission Willing to Work inquiry at <http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/209749/subpfr356-human-services-identifying-reform-attachment1.pdf> and my submission to the McClure Review into Employment Services at <https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Welfare-review-1.pdf> as at 12th December 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See my submission to recent review of Federally funded VET at <http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/209750/subpfr356-human-services-identifying-reform-attachment2.pdf> as at 12th December 2016 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. See generally my 2014 Pre-Budget submission at <http://www.pc.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0006/209751/subpfr356-human-services-identifying-reform-attachment3.pdf> and also note my submission to the House Economics Committee Inquiry into tax deductibility at <http://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=00874c93-07f4-4b37-9403-c50fef481832&subId=407687> as at 12th December 2016. Both of these documents raise questions about the overly favourable treatment of NGOs, by the Government and the tax system. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)