**Response to DSS’s Discussion paper on ‘Ensuring a strong future for supported employment’**

1. **Are there other principles which should guide the Government’s policy direction for supported employment?**

The principles should also recognise the choice and control of people with disability in exploring employment interests and opportunities. This includes consideration for people with disability to have similar goals and interests as all members of society, which may include the desire to change employment throughout their lives and career progression.

A principle of choice and control should also recognise the value in keeping people with disability informed about and included in the wage setting process so that they understand award rates, industry structure, and the workplace modifications and role adjustments applicable to them.

1. **What is a ‘good’ participation outcome for a supported employee and how can good outcomes be measured?**

‘Good’ outcomes for supported employees can be demonstrated by the below indicators:

* the person has employment in a setting of their choice
* the person is experiencing a positive sense of self and purpose from the role
* the workplace is supportive of ongoing learning and skill development
* a career path exists for the person.

‘Good’ employment outcomes can be measured through:

* the number of people who attain employment
* the length of time it takes a person to find employment
* the duration of time people sustain employment
* qualitative feedback from people with disability to determine their experience of accessing and participating in employment, having access to career progression opportunities and advancing in their career
* feedback from employers
* attendance in training to progress career.

1. **What do supported employees most value about working in an ADE?**

A supported workplace can provide:

* a sense of purpose and achievement
* a strong sense of community as well as allow for the development of long-lasting friendships
* opportunities to enjoy valued social roles as employees
* consistency in the workplace as people know that they will do the same job with the same people every day. If there is a change to the role, there is support available to assist people to adjust to the new expectations, processes and duties
* a routine that can dispel habits that contribute to unemployment
* a sense of security, with the person or their friends/family viewing supported employment as a safer environment than open employment.

It should be noted that the first three points apply to employment generally and are not specific to supported employment.

1. **Why do most supported employees transition back to supported employment from open employment?**

A number of reasons can be attributed to the transition back to supported employment. These include:

* lack of support from other staff in open employment
* missing the relationships developed with colleagues from supported employment
* dissatisfaction with the open employment environment when their expectations of the new role do not match reality and/or there is inadequate support
* reduction in motivation levels when the person feels they are not valued in the workplace
* minimal upskilling opportunities in open employment in contrast to supported employment.

1. **How can more supported employees be provided the opportunity to choose open employment?**

Open employment should be encouraged as a viable option for people with disability, including those who are currently in supported employment. Supported employees can be assisted to explore open employment through:

* opportunities for skill building to prepare for a transition to open employment
* short-term placements or work experience programs in open employment to assist people to adjust to the differences in workplaces and to sample different jobs
* peer mentoring by other people in the workforce who have transitioned from supported to open employment
* payment incentives aligned to longer term outcomes, hence longer periods of support through the transition to enable retention in open employment.

1. **Why is participant access to concurrent DES and ADE support services so low?**

A number of factors may contribute to the low rate of participant access to concurrent DES and ADE support services. These include:

* lack of knowledge and promotion in the sector regarding available services
* in some instances, there may not be policies in ADEs that encourage viewing supported employment as a stepping stone to open employment.

1. **What is the role a supported employer can play in building employee capacity for transition to open employment?**

Supported employers can build employee capacity to transition to open employment through:

* promoting purpose and identity through professional development processes for supported employees
* supporting employees to build skills and gain qualifications where appropriate
* exploring work experience opportunities for people with disability
* providing case studies of successful transitions to both supported employees as well as open employers
* identifying employment opportunities and assisting with resume writing and the job application process.

1. **What will attract NDIS participants to employment opportunities in the future?**

The following should be provided to attract NDIS participants to employment opportunities:

* choice of employment type (i.e. casual, part time, job share)
* support in developing and/or pursuing a career path
* information and about the purpose, benefits and expectations of employment
* opportunities for employment in jobs that are socially valued
* supportive employers who are willing to learn about and respond to a person’s abilities and support needs in the workplace
* income incentives.

1. **How are ADEs marketing their services to an expanded market of potential NDIS participants?**

Nil response.

1. **What is the range of NDIS supports that ADEs currently offer?**

* Pre-vocational training to develop job ready skills and encourage people with disability to explore their employment interests and goals.
* Customised employment through ADEs.

1. **What costs would be involved for ADEs that choose to:**
2. **Reform to more open employment models?**

Nil response.

1. **Redevelop as service providers offering other NDIS supports?**

Nil response.

1. **Specialise in the provision of employment support as a non-employer?**

Nil response.

1. **Should the Government have a role in supporting new market entrants and start-ups in the short-term?**

Yes, investment and support for such enterprises has benefits for the wider community. Research indicates that social enterprise employment should be supported as it provides a valuable option for employment for people with disability (Kayess, et al., 2016).

1. **What investment, or industry adjustment will promote viable expansion in the employer/provider market?**

Nil response.

1. **How could employer/providers share learnings of their successes and failures within a competitive market?**

Regular meetings or online forums would provide a good mechanism for the successes and failures of the sector to be shared, as well as the factors that support success.

1. **How can wage supplementation be better targeted?**

Nil response.

1. **How can the NDIS enable an employment first approach in planning?**

Supports and services that promote employment for people with disability should be included in plans. This can be facilitated through:

* the upskilling of planners so that they are aware of available ADE and DES services to support employment in a person’s plan
* inclusion of DES services in plans to support the person to attain employment of their choice
* discussing plan strategies that support the person’s understanding of work responsibilities and remuneration and skill building to become job-ready.

1. **How do current assessment processes drive the inclusion of employment supports in an NDIS participant’s plan?**

Nil response

1. **Are existing employment assessment processes appropriate for NDIS participants?**

Nil response.

1. **Are there different approaches to planning that could be explored for different groups of supported employees (e.g. younger workers, established workers, retirement transition)?**

There are different approaches to planning that could be explored. These are:

* including families and schools in the transition of young people from school to employment process
* for those already in supported employment, feedback should be sought and integrated in the planning process regarding their workplace satisfaction and their level of motivation for upskilling.

1. **How could SLES better support school leavers to build skills and confidence in order to move from school to employment?**

On the job mentoring via work experience is a great tool to build confidence and create network opportunities for school leavers. Having employers present to students a snapshot of what work-life encompasses may alleviate anxiety school leavers may feel towards the transition.

1. **What role could or should an NDIA Local Area Coordinator or planner have in linking participants to an employment opportunity?**

An LAC or planner could or should promote employment in planning by:

* linking people with disability to appropriate sources of support and information
* including relevant supports in a person’s plan
* facilitating the exploration of interests through creative processes and community opportunities
* considering the school-to-work transition in goal planning from an early age (not just in the final year of schooling) in order to optimise employment opportunities and outcomes
* in Western Australia, a Customised Employment concept has been run in Kwinana and Cockburn whereby Local Coordinators attend a shortened version of the comprehensive training provided to participants. This customised employment concept is a discovery process where participants and Local Coordinators begin creating a circle of supports (disability service providers) to achieve employment goals.

1. **What role could or should NDIA market stewardship have in developing a market with a range of employment, other support, or participation options for existing supported employees?**

The Western Australian experience has shown that support and stewardship has resulted in a strong disability sector. There is an ongoing tension between stewardship and being perceived as controlling a market. The reality is that support will be required for both employees and employers. Without some form of collaborative relationship between Government and private enterprise, employment choice will remain limited for people with disability in the longer term.

Support can be provided to the sector through:

* extended subsidies resulting in a larger variety of employers being available to participants
* the National Disability Insurance Agency directly becoming involved with participant job planning, resulting in the provision of more holistic assistance for supported employees to upskill and remain engaged with their employment duties and career goals
* Information Linkages and Capacity Building grants to support market development
* Information and tools that provide employers with information about available resources and how to support someone with a disability in the workplace.