



6 May 2021

Submission to the public consultation process for the National Disability Employment Strategy

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To whom it may concern,

This is our submission to the public consultation process for the National Disability Employment Strategy.

WHERE WE ARE FAILING

We believe there are three main areas we are failing autistic young adults in the transition from school to the world of work for those who are capable of undertaking tertiary education (either via TAFE or University):

- a. Transition to university or TAFE – we don't have adequately understood or supported pathways from high school to this next stage of education. Parents and carers don't have confidence in the safety of the transition and the autistic individuals don't feel empowered to take that step. So, we end-up with a lot of non-completion of high school and large numbers that don't go on to higher education. This is anecdotal and I don't think we have a good handle of the numbers involved; but I have not had anyone refute this.
- b. Even for those that get to university, a material proportion don't make it through the first year. In our estimation, only about one in four or one in five autistic students will disclose at university. The stigma they have experiences at high school is a burden that weighs on them and they naturally avoid this and try to get by on their own. The transition to university is difficult for many young adults – but the sensory issues that many autistics have amplifies this. So, it is often the case that towards the end of the first year, when assignments are due and exams are looming, they either drop-out or only then seek assistance – when it is likely too late. Often universities only find out after the fact.
- c. For those that do make it through academically, they tend not to have any work experience – their CV is basically just their academic record – and so they don't really stand a chance against their neurotypical peers. Hiring managers will therefore tend to take the “safe option” and go with the neurotypical candidate – who will likely have had a number of internships during their student journey.



WHAT WE ARE DOING ABOUT IT

Untapped Holdings

Our organisation works on creating a sustainable neurodiverse employment ecosystem. There are many facets to this, including:

- a. Working with companies who are interested in implementing an autism at work program and assisting them in implementing a proven model that encompasses attraction, screening, assessment, recruitment, on-boarding and ongoing support and development through a multi-year program. When we talk to companies, we focus on business capability, not inclusion. We try and speak with the business side, not the HR department. We believe that this is how we are better able to develop a compelling business case.
- b. Assisting the companies become more neurodiverse-ready via a communication strategy, employee training, workplace assessment and appropriate accommodations
- c. Creating a pipeline of talent – through Universities and TAFEs – via the Neurodiversity Hub initiative (refer below). Encouraging universities and employers to become members of this community of practice.
- d. Linking with Disability Employment Service providers – as a source of young adults seeking opportunities and also to assist in placing those not successful in the assessment process for autism-at-work programs.

We are directly involved in programs at a number of companies including large financial institutions and a number of Federal Government departments. We are also in discussion with a number of large corporations in various sectors, including banking and finance, resources, telecommunications, utilities, engineering, accounting and legal.

Neurodiversity Hub

The Neurodiversity Hub (www.neurodiversityhub.org) initiative is a community of practice spanning universities, colleges and organisations both locally and internationally. It has developed resources to assist universities and employers become more neurodiverse-friendly and support neurodiverse students through their studies and increase their chances of entering employment. We have assembled a significant amount of resources for students, parents/carers, employers and universities.

Please refer: <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/resources>

The universities in the Hub can be found here: <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/universities#universities-2>

The employer members of the Hub can be found here: <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/employers>



“Be Your Best”

We have also assembled a group of neurodiverse individuals to design, write, edit and illustrate life skills training materials specifically for neurodiverse young adults.

Please refer: <https://www.beyourbest.academy/pages/about-us>

The curriculum developed and under development includes:

- organisational skills
- cooking and nutrition
- presentation skills
- relationships
- independent living for neurodiverse professionals

The team has also developed short courses on: “What is Neurodiversity”.

Other initiatives

Some other initiatives we are involved with include:

- Deploying a mental health support toolkit for use in autistic employment through a significant study lead by La Trobe University, with international collaboration. This is intended to help people on the spectrum and their employers understand the impact of mental health issues related to autism and help reduce the impact of stress, anxiety and depression and reduce the risk of suicide amongst autistic individuals.
- Leading an autism inclusion initiative for AustCyber (a Department of Industry, Science, Energy and Resources Industry Growth Centre initiative), to attract neurodiverse talent into the cybersecurity industry. This initiative is supported by organisations such as BHP, La Trobe University, Curtin University, DXC, Inside Sherpa and Splunk. We are also collaborating with AISA (Australian Information Security Association) and have discussions underway with other large companies and law enforcement agencies.

The initiative is called “Genius Armoury” (<https://geniusarmoury.com>) and is being launched at the AusCERT Cybersecurity Conference on 13 May 2021. The platform provides 5-6 hours of content to provide a sense of what is involved in a job as a cybersecurity analyst to create interest amongst this cohort and provide information on further education options and employment programs to apply for.

- An internship to create an innovation and intrapreneurship ecosystem
 - Curating relevant resources for autists who have a business idea but don’t know where to start



- Working with companies that have innovation and intrapreneurship programs with the intent of helping them make those programs more inclusive
- Refer: <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/entrepreneurship>
- A collaboration with building designers and architects to create a section of the Hub focussed on the built environment – encouraging the design of buildings and workspaces that are more neurodiverse-friendly.
 - Refer: <https://www.neurodiversityhub.org/enabling-spaces>

If we can leave you with one key take-away, it is that mental health support for this population is critical for long-term sustainable employment. This has been shown in the evidence-based research that DXC Technology and ANZ has funded with La Trobe University. Any neurodiverse employment initiative that does not have mental health support as a consideration will likely have less sustainable success and will potentially adversely impact the participants.

We would be very happy to share and discuss our activities more broadly and how we believe we can work together to create more jobs and greater self-determination amongst this cohort.

Kind regards

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew Eddy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Andrew Eddy
CEO & Founder
Untapped Holdings Pty Ltd