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**Submission in Response to the** **National Disability Employment Strategy Consultation Paper 2021**

NDS welcomes this opportunity to respond to the National Disability Employment Strategy Consultation Paper released in April 2021. In addition to sitting under the 2021-2031 National Disability Strategy, the National Disability Employment Strategy should also align with the goals of the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy and the APS Disability Employment Strategy.

This submission will respond to the consultations paper’s seven questions for consideration. An appendix is attached addressing youth transition policy, prepared by NDS’s [Ticket to Work](https://tickettowork.org.au/) initiative.

**Are there barriers or concerns for jobseekers with disability not covered in the consultation paper?**

NDS has previously identified barriers to jobseekers with disability that require government policy reform. We recommend these barriers be addressed as below:

* Remove the requirement for DES participants to have eight hours per week work capacity, as many supported employees and NDIS participants would not achieve this.
* Allow organisations not funded previously by DSS to utilise “supports in employment” to assist NDIS participants if the former meet the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Framework requirements. This would increase the access of NDIS participants to employment opportunities in options such as social enterprises.
* Ensure supports in employment is available to NDIS participants seeking to engage in self-employment.
* Wind back the stifling levels of regulation and increasingly punitive compliance that misdirects DES provider resources to contract administration rather than assisting people with disability to gain and maintain employment.
* Reform the jobseeker assessment gateway used by government agencies (i.e. the ESAt and JCA) so that people with disability are directed to appropriate service support streams.
* Ensure transition supports are more widely available to young people, better targeted and able to be accessed while young people are still in school.

**Are there barriers or concerns for employers not covered in this consultation paper?**

NDS maintains that employer incentives will drive better outcomes than quotas or linking the employment of people with disability with additional compliance and reporting.

It is extremely important that assistance is available to help employers adopt a ‘disability confident’ culture and understand concepts such as ‘reasonable adjustment’. Enhanced disability confidence of employers will also help minimise instances of abuse and exploitation of people with disability in employment settings as well as reducing discrimination in employer recruitment practices. However, if an accreditation system identifying the disability confidence of employers is considered, it should ideally not impose additional compliance on employers.

Assisting employers with their disability confidence could be achieved through additional support for service providers to engage constructively with employers to meet their needs and encourage flexibility in employment practices. The current DES model is not conducive to this practice.

Investment in the supply side that increases the work capacity and skills of people with disability will not be enough to ensure that they gain employment. Employer taxes, minimum wages and industrial relations regulations will continue to stifle employer demand for labour and should be re-evaluated post COVID-19.

**Do you have any feedback on the proposed vision or priority areas?**

NDS largely agrees with the wording used in the Proposed Employment Strategy Vision but would suggest excluding the word “opportunities”.

**Improving systems and services:**

NDS remains concerned that the DES program is becoming increasingly unfit for purpose and has moved away from assisting its original cohort of people with disability, especially people with intellectual disability.

There are too many participants in DES, many of whom could be moved into the proposed New Employment Services Model (NESM) which will replace Jobactive from July 2022.

NDS recommends the following significant reforms to DES, commencing from the next contract in July 2023:

Pare back the eligible DES cohort to the following:

* DSP recipients
* Parenting Payment Partnered/Single recipients
* Other Pension or Allowance recipients
* Non allowees

Other potential participants could include NDIS participants eligible for supports in employment, or those moving from transition program into the open labour market.

As there would be few participants with mutual obligation, there would be reduced potential to place participants into a job that does not suit their skill set or career goals.

Funding would be based on the supports in employment rate with a reduced outcome fee for successfully placing in a participant in employment that lasts 4, 13, 26 and 52 weeks.

Employment outcome benchmarks would include:

* 3 hours per week (for NDIS participants)
* 7.6 hours
* 15 hours
* 22.8 hours

Consideration should also be given to reinstating a 30 hour benchmark.

Ongoing support would be a core component in the funding model and based on the NDIS supports in employment hourly rate.

It is recommended that employment consultants have appropriate qualifications prior to or within six months of commencing employment with a DES provider.

The current ESAs would be retained with a maximum of three contracted providers in each ESA and a positive weighting for smaller local organisations who can demonstrate an ongoing connection with the local community. This will allow more participant choice and control while ensuring less potential for “sharp” provider practices and employer “fatigue” from excessive approaches by providers.

NDS estimates[[1]](#footnote-1) the eligible participant numbers in this proposed DES model would be around 60,000-70,000 and that 26 Week Outcomes per 1,000 participants in the commenced phase would increase from 19 to around 41.

**Which actions or initiatives would best create positive change for people with disability and employers?**

**Effective recruitment and job matching strategies:**

These are needed to ensure the employment engagement process is simple, flexible and easy to navigate. It is imperative there is investment in people with disability that allows them to better meet employer needs. These outcomes can be achieved through the NDIS Participant Employment Strategy and models such as Customised Employment.

Personalised career planning will assist jobseekers better match employer needs. This planning should take into account a person’s disability type, career goals, relevant skills and current labour market considerations.

**Creating an enabling work environment**

It is vital that information on assistance measures such as wage subsidies, workplace modifications, specialist advice and personal support is better publicised, more widely available and easily accessible. These measures (e.g. such as the Employee Assistance Fund) should be retained and integrated with other sources of employer support.

**Harnessing the knowledge and experience of Supported employment providers:**

Disability Enterprises are the most “disability confident employers” in the country. They possess a wealth of knowledge and practical firsthand experience in the following aspects of disability employment:

* Recruitment
* Provision of work experience
* Transition to work supports for young people
* Vocational training
* Workplace health and safety
* Provision of on the job support that maximizes employee skills and productivity
* Provision of non-vocational training and support, e.g. travel training

NDS recommends the Australian Government implement an initiative that enables supported employment providers to formally partner with mainstream employers to assist the latter to:

* Enhance their disability employment awareness and confidence
* Provide ongoing employment opportunities and support for people with disability

The Inclusive Employment Movement (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6E4QgTVPTmY>) operating in partnership with the Endeavour Foundation (the largest supported employment provider in Australia) is an example of such an initiative.

**How should we report against and measure the success of the Employment Strategy?**

NDS recommends a set of strategy goals and performance indicators are developed that enable reporting against the Strategy’s priority areas. Benchmarks should also be established in order to gauge progress over the strategy’s duration.

Monitor employment placement data, through the SDAC and the NDIS participant employment strategy. Monitor workforce participation and employment rates of people with disability in OECD countries so as to compare Australia’s performance.

Other important sources could include more detailed DES data, supports in employment data (NDIS) and data on NDIS participants in paid employment.

Both quantitative and qualitative data should be collected and reported on. The Australian government should report on the Strategy’s progress to parliament annually and progress towards outcomes should be visible to the public.

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**National Disability Services** is the peak industry body for non-government disability services. It represents service providers across Australia in their work to deliver high-quality supports and life opportunities for people with disability. Its Australia-wide membership includes over 1,150 non-government organisations which support people with all forms of disability. Its members collectively provide the full range of disability services — from accommodation support, respite and therapy to community access and employment. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to State, Territory and Federal governments.

1. Estimates have been calculated based on DES Monthly Data on the [Labor Market Information Portal](https://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/Downloads/DisabilityEmploymentServicesData/MonthlyData) (LMIP) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)