

Submission to the Australian Government’s consultation on the development of a Disability Employment Strategy (‘The Strategy’)

The Australian Centre for Career Education

The Australian Centre for Career Education (trading as CEAV Inc) is a national association and thought leader in career development. We were established in 1975 by the Victorian Department of Education to deliver more than 30,000 career interventions across Victoria each year. CEAV is an endorsed provider of professional careers services by the peak industry body, the Career Industry Council of Australia (CICA). We are a not for profit, national charity that works for the good of all Australians.

ACCE has a proud 45-year history of supporting positive employment outcomes for youth and adults of all abilities. Our mission is to ensure all Australians have access to quality career development support and accredited career counselling, particularly those in the community who need additional support. Our career training and services are based on a model of person-centred support that ensures jobseekers receive quality career interventions and best practice career tools suited to their individual needs.

Our experience supporting students with a disability

CEAV has been involved in training, resource creation and career development projects to support educators, parents, and young people with a disability to enter employment or skills and training pathways, including mainstream employment. Our *Building Ability through Career Management* project (2018-2019) supported post-school pathways for young people living with disability. Funded by the Department of Health and Human Services, the program provided training in work readiness programs and included structured career education activities. It included parent information sessions and resources, training for disability professionals about career guidance, work readiness for young people with a disability, and building work readiness workshops for young people with disability.

During the COVID-19 lock downs in Victoria, CEAV worked with Morrisby Profile, a leading career assessment tool provider, to develop alternative pathways for young people disengaged from education and young people with additional needs. The new pathways are now available and we hope to undertake further testing with young people in Out of Home Care.

Employment issues for people with a disability

CEAV recognises that people with disability continue to face barriers to employment and reduced equity in employment expectations. The *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* has identified that significant barriers and bullying can occur in relation to workforce participation. For those with a visibly noticeable disability, discrimination can occur before employment and at the interview stage. For those with less obvious disabilities such as cognitive, learning and neurodevelopment differences or mental health issues, there are still significant impediments to their workforce participation.

Some respondents to the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* noted that they choose not to disclose their condition. In doing so they recognised that they place themselves at risk by not having proper or safe workplace accommodations to support their needs. Nonetheless, they preferred to hide their disability to avoid discrimination.

Government support for improved outcomes

The Australian Government has taken many positive steps to improve the lives of people with a disability. Australia passed the *Disability Services Act 1986*, the *Disability Discrimination Act 1992*, ratified the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2008, and rolled out the NDIS commencing in 2013.

These actions and the implementation of the NDIS have increased opportunities for people with a disability to experience self-determination, independence, and mainstream community inclusion. It has placed support decision-making in the hands of participants, yet social and cultural changes are still needed to reduce the barriers to employment and overcome discrimination and bullying within the community and workplaces.

Supports that governments have implemented to encourage greater workforce participation by people with a disability include:

- The Disabled Australian Apprentice Wage Support for employers who employ a disabled apprentice or trainee.
- A Wage Subsidy Scheme for jobseekers registered with a Disability Employment Services provider.
- Wage Connect subsidies to encourage employers to offer jobs to long term unemployed people registered with an Australian Government employment service provider.
- Employment Pathways Fund for jobseekers registered with Job Services Australia.
- Indigenous Wage Subsidy for jobseekers participating in Community.

- Supported Wage System for people with a disability not able to fulfill usual workplace productivity requirements, due to the nature of their disability.
- A NSW Government payroll tax exemption for employers of people with disability who are employed on or after 1 July 2011.

Some subsidies have attracted employers for financial gain, and this has not benefited people with a disability who can be viewed by some employers as little more than cheap labour. However, targets and incentives are still important as disability employment remains lower than that of people without a disability. As more than one solution is needed to support change, CEAV submits the following feedback to inform The Strategy based on the four priority areas identified for improvement by the Government.

1. Lifting employer engagement, capability, and demand: providing employers with the tools and abilities to confidently hire, support and develop more people with disability.

Graduates with a disability also face discrimination. Graduate Careers Australia identified in their report, *Graduate Destination 2015*, that the percentage of graduates with a disability who are either unemployed or seeking full time work is 23.5% compared to non-disabled students 11.3%¹. A number of initiatives aim to support students with a disability including the *Employment Assistance Fund* through JobAccess, *PACE Mentoring*, *Stepping into Internships*, and the *University Specialist Employment Partnerships*. Despite these programs, many graduates with a disability struggle to find employment. While several career development research projects are underway at Australian Universities to investigate solutions to the barriers graduates face, these graduates have a more immediate need.

An increase in graduate employment programs with incentives for employers to host graduates with a disability for more than a year, may improve employment outcomes. In addition, the payroll tax exemptions provided in NSW could be made available in other states with specific disability targets.

While disability employment services can assist employers to overcome barriers to employing someone with a disability, not all people with a disability seek to enter employment through these services. Increased awareness of the benefits of employing someone with a disability, access to a disability employment line that provides information and advice, and Disability Work Officers supporting employers to employ someone with a disability may help to improve disability employment rates.

¹ Graduate Careers Australia. (2015). *Graduate Destinations 2105*.
www.graduatecareers.com.au/graduateswithdisability

2. Building employment skills, experience, and confidence of young people with disability: ensuring young people with disability are supported to obtain meaningful work and careers of their choice.

From CEAVs career guidance work in the education sector, we have observed lower employment expectations for people with a disability. These expectations include, but are not limited to, the likelihood that someone with a disability will work fewer hours than a non-disabled person, perform lower skilled and less rewarding work, or only be suited to employment within a Disability Enterprise. While some of these expectations may suit a portion of people with a disability, they appear to be more endemic.

CEAV have worked with parents and educational organisations and note that parents and carers of children with a disability at times accept lower expectations of their child's career path as do many developmental school staff. This can be evidenced in career guidance funding for youth in developmental schools. While the Department of Education and Training Victoria supports CEAV to deliver over 30,000 Morrisby Profile assessments and career interviews in 550 state secondary schools across Victoria, equivalent services are not funded for students in developmental schools. 'Career development' is often supported by staff who may be special education staff, a social worker or other professional.

While there is no jurisdiction across Australia that mandates career education in schools, the Department of Education and Training Victoria has understood the important role career guidance plays in helping young people establish goals to transition into the workforce. For children with a disability, there can be limited or no access to career education delivered by accredited career practitioners in developmental schools. This creates an uneven playing field for these young people who need to understand what jobs align to their interests, establish goals for themselves, and develop the work readiness skills to pursue their goals.

Young people attending special developmental schools should receive professional career guidance support from an accredited career professional. It would be useful for students to commence this early before transitioning from school to support any necessary capacity and skill development.

3. Improving systems and services for jobseekers and employers: making it simpler for jobseekers with disability and employers to navigate and utilise government services and driving better performance from service providers.

CEAV believes that while there are opportunities to drive performance improvement among service providers and provide better navigation of government services for employers and jobseekers with a disability, employers must also commit to hiring people with a disability.

The government has provided a range of positive incentives, and established employment ecosystems to support employment within workplaces for people with a disability. It is equally incumbent upon organisations to take on some of this responsibility. While the Government can introduce disability employment targets and regulations to ensure employers meet those targets, this is unlikely to overcome the discrimination and bullying in workplaces.

Employers may be more inclined to employ someone with a disability if they have increased confidence and knowledge. Information and training for disability employment could increase employer confidence in the same way that mental health training and information has been delivered to organisations. This in combination with support for employers to streamline induction, workplace modifications and transition an employee into their organisation may increase workforce participation.

4. Changing community attitudes: changing people's perception and expectation about the capability of people with disability in the workplace.

While significant social shifts in attitude can be managed with continuous advocacy, regulation and incentives, the best and most effective method of change is achieved across the lifespan, and when change starts early. For this reason, the education system remains one of the earliest systems in which pervasive long-term change can begin to occur across a population.

Responses to the *Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability* (Education Issues Paper) identified that children with a disability may be neglected or inappropriately supported at school. This results in educational inequity, their disability is often misunderstood as are their strengths, and they experience bullying at a much higher rate than children without a disability.

While many valid recommendations have been made to the Royal Commission and are supported by CEAV, the additional explicit and implicit teaching of inclusion and empathy to everyone in school populations may deliver lifelong skills that students take with them to the workplace. It would enable children who do not have a disability to develop a different experience of people with a disability and different expectations, and children with a disability will develop different expectations for themselves. With a shift in social attitude across the lifespan, more people with a disability may find employment.

In addition to the four priority areas, CEAV would acknowledge that people with disabilities who receive a disability pension are penalised for working more than 30 hours a week, or they lose their pension. This approach to employment does not encourage or support people with disabilities to find and maintain work. As people with a disability are more likely to work fewer hours and in lower paying work than people without a disability, this only contributes to more people with a disability having lower incomes compared to those without a disability.

With ever higher living expenses and costs associated with having a disability, people with a disability lack financial security despite the NDIS funding their support. CEAV believes that a new financial assessment should be developed for people with a disability who both receive the pension and income from employment. The new assessment approach should ensure they achieve an adequate and secure standard of living and are supported to achieve their best employment outcome, and one that supports their goals.

If you have any questions about this submission, or to arrange a consultation, please contact:

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