

**JOBLIFE RESPONSE TO
NATIONAL DISABILITY EMPLOYMENT
STRATEGY CONSULTATION PAPER
APRIL 2021**



About Joblife

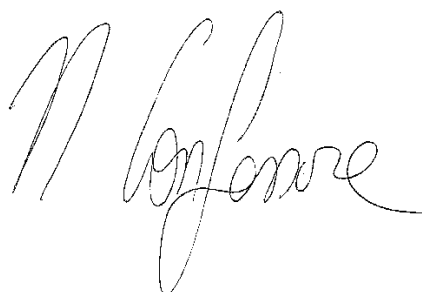
Joblife is an experienced employment services provider operating across Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, Western Australia and South Australia. With a focus on supporting people with a disability to find and keep work, our vision is “a job for everybody”.

Joblife is a unique joint venture between Australia’s pre-eminent not-for-profit social purpose organisations, Life Without Barriers, and leading employment services company, the Angus Knight Group.

Joblife currently works with over 3500 job seekers across our footprint and have successfully supported many into employment or further education.

In considering the Department’s discussion paper, Joblife have provided feedback based on our experience in connecting people with disability with work. These insights are offered to add value to this process. We have also offered some suggestions for areas of work, or highlighted those we believe would add value to existing approaches and services.

We look forward to participating in the continued development of the National Disability Employment Strategy.



Nunzia Confessore
Chief Executive Officer
Joblife Employment

The Focus of the National Disability Employment Strategy

Joblife support the four key focus areas outlined in the Disability Employment Strategy. Joblife agree that in order to support an increase in the rates of employment of people with a disability, it is necessary to see coordinated action at a national, regional, local and individual level. Our response reflects the areas where Joblife believes this effort is required. That is:

1. Lift employer engagement, capability and demand
2. Building employment skills, experience and confidence of young people with disability – however believe this should extend to all people with a disability, not just focus on those
3. Improving systems and services for jobseekers and employers: making it simpler for job seekers with disability and employers to navigate and utilise government services and driving better performance from service providers.
4. Changing community attitudes: changing people's perception and expectation about the capability of people with disability in the workplace.

In responding to this paper, Joblife acknowledge the considerable work done already, particularly by people with disability to advocate for access to employment, yet we note Australia is currently ranked 21st out of 29 OECD countries for employment rates for people with disability. Without bold leadership, significant investment we will not see progress. Joblife look forward to the development of a bold Disability Employment Strategy which will deliver this change.

Lifting employer engagement, capability and demand

Joblife understands clearly that employers make the hiring decision. Ensuring that there is demand from employers to employ people with disability within their workplace must be a priority.

Joblife staff work closely with employers to encourage, motivate and support them to employ people with disability. While this work occurs almost one on one, there is a strong need for greater leadership and emphasis on encouraging, and in Joblife's view, requiring employers to hire people with disability.

Joblife engages regularly with employers to encourage them to employ people with disability. This localised, one on one advocacy and engagement can drive small outcomes at a local level, the importance of which cannot be overstated for those people affected. What it does not do however is drive or encourage change at a systemic and industry level.

A successful Disability Employment Strategy must combine measures such as these local, relationship-based focusses, with larger industry led and national strategies which encourage employers to make different hiring decisions. To lift employer engagement, will require a combination of measures which encourage employer participation, and those which mandate or require it.

Joblife advocate for a Disability Employment Strategy which commits to more direct actions which compel employers to actively consider employment of people with disability in their workplaces. Joblife see two areas where this could be considered:

Employer Commitments in the Public Sector

Joblife note encouragingly, that government departments at both the Commonwealth and State level have introduced measures which track the employment levels of people with a disability in their organisations. These targets however are aspirational and while measures and reported on, do not guarantee opportunities.

Further, the targets set (of between 5 and 8 percent) fall well below levels of disability in our community. More ambitious and rigorously enforced targets should be considered. This would both create greater employment for people with disability and would demonstrate the necessary leadership required to engage and work with other private sector businesses.

Using Government Procurement Levers

Use of procurement levers must also be more actively considered. Use of the inclusive procurement practices should go beyond encouraging measures in contractors. The purchasing power of Government provides a significant opportunity to create change.

Public procurement policies focussed on increasing Indigenous participation in employment and business have increasingly yielded positive results for this community. These successful policies could be mirrored to create opportunities for people with disability in major contracting and procurement exercises, and infrastructure projects.

Areas outlined in the Discussion Paper

Joblife support the measures outlined in the discussion paper as areas which would also assist in Lifting employer engagement, capability and demand including:

- Using role models, mentoring, story-telling and case studies to build employer confidence and normalise employment of people with disability.
- Developing and promoting information, tools and resources to:
 - build employer capability and confidence to hire people with disability
 - provide on-the-job support for employers and people with disability
 - support employers to assist people with a newly acquired disability to return to work
 - influence emerging sectors to establish inclusive business practices from the start
 - encourage inclusive procurement practices.

Joblife note the fantastic work conducted by Job Access to create tools and supports for employers. Further work like this must continue to ensure these resources become common place for all employers when recruiting.

Building employment skills, experience and confidence of young people with disability

Joblife work with over 3500 people nationally supporting them to gain the skills, experience, and confidence to move into work. In our experience, the vast majority of job seekers are interested, willing and eager to move into employment. As noted above, often the work required is in engaging employers.

Supporting Young People

With regards to young people, Joblife believe a specialised approach is necessary to support young people with a disability to engage with work. We support an early intervention approach, including as the young people are still in school and prior to them leaving school. Joblife work specifically in this area through things such as our early intervention school project which combines access to National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) supports and DES.

Early intervention - Joblife's Young People's Employment Pathways program

Joblife work with young people specifically transitioning from school to employment through our Young People's Employment Pathways program. This program is specifically focussed on supports young people with disability to gain skills and experience and to find meaningful employment.

This support leverages the strengths of major social service provider Life Without Barriers and Joblife to offer flexible and individualised support service. Our trained team members support young people in building the confidence and skills needed to prepare for working life. This intensive support can start direct from school, ensures young people don't fall through the gap. It connects NDIS support, with DES support to effectively deliver outcomes.

Accessing Support through NDIS and DES

The example above showcases work undertaken by Joblife to leverage supports from NDIS and the School Leaver Employment Support (SLES) available through DES. This allows for an overlap in support between these streams, which enables shorter, sharper delivery of employment supports. This intensive focus harnesses the best of supports to maximise employment outcomes.

Current program parameters do not allow for this simultaneous overlap for any other component of NDIS or DES funding. There is an opportunity to review this approach and allow for it to be replicated across other age groups and program streams.

Other Comments

Joblife note the focus in the paper is on younger people, however, would note that a Disability Employment Strategy should continue to promote employment skills, experience and confidence of all people with a disability seeking work.

Areas outlined in the Discussion Paper

Joblife support the measures outlined in the discussion paper as areas which would also assist in building employment skills, experience and confidence of young people with disability including:

- Improving career development opportunities (e.g. tools to understand potential career interest areas, work experience, volunteering or job readiness programs) for young people with disability while they are at school; and
- Developing and promoting information, tools and resources to build the capacity and confidence of support networks to assist young people with disability on their employment journey.

Improving systems and services for job seekers and employers

Building on What Works

Programs and supports focussed on supporting people with disability to find and keep work have undergone significant reform in the past decade. These changes have been focussed on seeking to improve on the way in which clients can access, and use supports to move into work, and to ensure that sufficient resources are being provided to this effort.

While Government's should seek to continuously improve on the support delivered by employment service providers, continuous reform and change has created unintended consequences in the market due to the instability in program design and delivery. This ultimate impacts on both the clients and employers the service system is designed to support.

To ensure that good practice is retained and remain a focus on the incremental improvement of supports and systems available to connect employers and job seekers. This approach should be iterative.

Supporting Access to Education and Pathways

Ensuring that program design recognises the need to undertake preparatory work job seekers is critical, including in areas such as accessing training and education. Within the Disability Employment Service, while current program parameters do not prohibit this, program levers, including performance do not recognise this as a positive outcome which will overtime drive behaviour in the market.

Assessment that supports service delivery

Joblife support improvements to tools such as Employment Services Assessments and believe reviewing mutual obligation requirements to motivate and enable participation should remain in scope. Any areas which could improve and enhance this, including improvements to access of assessments, or the introduction of strength-based processes is welcomed.

Supporting Certainty Through Market Share

The current DES model has a focus on choice and control. One mechanism with which that has been delivered is via having a wide provider market with no market share offered to service providers, rather they must compete to provide services to clients.

Joblife note there could be benefit in considering introducing market share to the DES market to offer stability to service providers, and to concentrate performance and delivery. This would still allow choice and control for job seekers, without diluting the service offering across the region.

Supporting Work Experience

Social enterprise, and Australia Disability Enterprises could continue to play a role in creating opportunities for work for people with disability who may not be suitable or not ready yet for open employment. In addition to focus on these opportunities, the strategy should also look at how to safely enable paid work experience with real employers. Paid internships could form one avenue.



Changing community attitudes

Joblife support activities focussed on changing community attitudes around people with disability. Our organisation works to promote positive images and stories of people with a disability throughout our work, both internally and externally. An example of this is our own internal campaign which focusses on sharing information about living with a disability, as well as promoting the achievements of our own staff.

While organisations such as Joblife will undertake this work with our organisation, as with employer engagement, Joblife believes there is a significant role for Government in leading this work and support measures which encourage this.

Continuing to Support Additional Research

A focus on ensuring that there is an up-to-date research on the nature of disability in Australia would be advantageous. While this is undertaken in many pockets by industry and advocacy groups, centralised research undertaken by, or supported by Government would continue to add value to the understanding of life for those with a disability, and how they access work in Australia.

Promoting Disability Accreditation

There would be merit in promoting Disability Accreditation for organisations around Australia. This would need to be led by either Government or an independent authority to provide validity, this could be used to highlight the benefits of being an organisation which supports people with a disability. Things such as the National Disability Employment Standards may present a model. There should then be demonstrative benefit for organisations for having this (including as noted through things such as procurement levers).

Broadening Community Understanding Disability

There would be value in undertaking education to broaden the communities understanding of 'disability'. A perception still exists within the community that disability is confined to physical or intellectual

disability. The contemporary understanding of disability is much broader than this, and work should be undertaken to educate the community on this.

Areas outlined in the Discussion Paper

Joblife support the measures outlined in the discussion paper as areas which would also assist in changing community attitudes including:

- a public communications campaign that challenges stereotypes and emphasises the value of diversity
- encouraging mainstream media outlets to develop and air content that is produced by, and or showcasing, people with disability. These would not focus solely on those who are considered 'exceptional', but also people with disability enjoying an 'ordinary life'
- using "myth-busting" approaches to challenge existing views
- building disability employment awareness training into relevant tertiary qualifications for professionals (e.g. career advisory staff, rehabilitation case managers)

