



Creating Equality Through Employment

Disability Employment Services 2023

Consultation Paper Response



Disability Employment Support Model Consultation

ABOUT THE PERSONNEL GROUP

The Personnel Group welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback that will influence the development of a new disability employment support program. The Personnel Group's purpose - 'creating equality through employment' aligns closely with the stated objectives of the proposed DES Reforms.

The Personnel Group (TPG) is an experienced, high performing provider of employment services to people with a disability. The Personnel Group commenced operations in 1986 at the outset of the disability open employment sector and has delivered the Australian Government's disability employment program through its various iterations and responsible Departments since.

TPG has delivered DES through Block funding, Case Based Funding, Capped Market share and Open market.

As one of Australia's high performing providers TPG, achieves high ratings and extremely positive feedback from program participants, employers, and service providers. Ongoing success is based on building deep, long lasting connections within the communities they support. These relationships have been developed over decades and generations.

Operating predominantly in non-metropolitan settings, TPG specialises in delivering services in regional and remote communities where clear differences in the community and employer activation piece must not be overlooked in new program design.

TPG operates from stand alone sites and colocations with specialist community services and neighbourhood houses, TPG is the employment focused consortium member on 12 headspace consortiums.

The Personnel Group is extremely well placed to provide feedback on what works in delivering disability employment supports and what doesn't especially in these areas.



Context

A key consideration, not referenced in this Paper, but a vital element of reform is managing the cost of the disability. Any system needs to have an understanding of, and acceptance of this. Many PWD are frightened of losing their health care card, and other benefits, if they work. Participants needing to manage their work/benefits regime is, currently, an unintended consequence of an augmented work schedule. Many PWD experience high costs of disability management, and although they may be capable of working above benchmark, they have too much to lose if they are no longer eligible for subsidized medications, treatment etc. A participant with high prescription costs, or will be required to manage their own transport or personal needs, does not benefit at all from work if they lose said benefit.

Is DES really an underperforming program?

While the consultation paper states that the mid-term review of DES found that the program was not meeting its objectives efficiently and effectively, The Personnel Group would refute this assertion. It would argue that the program has largely achieved stated program objectives. This included providing program participants with choice and control and targeting the program to an estimated 250,000 people with disabilities who were not working or attempting to find work. At contract commencement providers were repeatedly encouraged by the Department to attract, engage and to find work for these cohorts. Irrespective of the number of additional participants seeking employment, the labour market has a finite number of suitable roles available at any point in time. The Department must accept this dichotomy in its assessment of program 'success' and acknowledge the labour market has substantially changed during Covid.

TPG would argue that the 'underperformance of the program' has come from providers attracting and engaging these cohorts so successfully that the size and spend of the program inflated beyond budget estimates. The Department has rightly noted that providers have not placed and achieved expected outcomes for the caseload however TPG would counter that:

- The targeted cohorts generally had lower capacity levels and required greater time and investment to prepare for work, and
- That any assessment of performance comparative to a previous contract is not truly accurate, given the unprecedented labour market conditions created by catastrophic bushfires in 2019, and then the Covid Pandemic in 2020 and 2021. It must also be stated that data provided by DSS over the past year shows clearly that DES is achieving outcomes at a high rate.

Today DES costs the Government roughly the same per participant as at program commencement, but there are just more participants. Government data states that in 2016 \$800,000,000 was spent supporting 180,000 participants¹ equating to \$4,444 per participant. In 2021 \$1,400,000,000 was spent supporting 310,000 participants equating to \$4,516 per participant. The increase of \$72 per participant over 5 years is lower than CPI or inflation.

With current referrals to DES of approx. 310,000 people who have had a Services Australia needs assessment, the pool of Australians with disability who should have access to increased support to get and keep a job is already defined.

The Nationals *for Regional Australia*, Policy Document 2019 Campaign, Our Plan to Support and Provide Opportunity for People with Disability², pg. 8 excerpt states:

“The Liberal and Nationals Government is committed to helping people with disability who have the desire and capacity to work, to find and keep a job.

Our significant reforms to Disability Employment Services (DES) on 1 July 2018 have seen a 27 per cent increase in the number of people with disability voluntarily participating in the DES program.

Because of these reforms, we are also seeing greater employment outcomes – 82 percent of successful job placements are lasting at least 13 weeks, an increase of 24 per cent over previous arrangements....”

¹ Department of Social Services – DES Reform 2018 Industry Information Paper, July 2017, p. 7; and New DES from 2018 Discussion Paper, November 2017, p. 3.

² The Nationals Policy Document, November 2019, Authorised by B. Hindmarsh, National Party of Australia.



This positive data is also reinforced by through the outcomes stated in the Department's implemented DES Review³ by Boston Consulting Group (BCG). BCG found that 26-week employment rates were more often achieved for DES DMS and ESS clients than for JobActive Stream C participants. Further acknowledging that DES works. The Personnel Group would argue that the program is largely performing well, and requires improvements, rather than wholesale changes.

In this response, TPG has taken the approach to give key points for consideration under each question, and provide the Department with extensive insight into delivering best practice supports from both the client and employer perspective. TPG is more than willing to expand on any point raised in this response rather than provide a lengthy narrative on each question.

³ Boston Consulting Group 2020, 2020 ESAt Review, The Department of Social Services, https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2021



TOPIC ONE

Who should be able to access a specialist disability employment program?



1. Who should be able to access a specialist disability employment program?

1.1 Who should be able to access a specialist disability employment program?

The Personnel Group would assert that a review of evidence on who currently access the program forms the basis for who needs to be able to access DES. In short, the program should be accessible to every person who meets the key criteria:

- They should be assessed as requiring more significant supports than are available through mainstream employment channels or online servicing, due to their disability or condition. This assessment should be simple and transparent.
- They should have a genuine desire to work and a willingness to accept the support of their provider.
- Any NDIS participant who has employment in their program (all NDIS participants within the eligible age range should have employment as a goal and part of their plan).
- Income support nor mutual obligation should be a condition of accessing DES.

1.2 Should a future DES include employment pathways such as casual and part time employment, community engagement, voluntary work, and short-term unpaid work experience?

- Yes, this is normal employment development. The role of disability employment supports should be to support the long-term employment of a participant, not just to get them a job.
- The challenge will be designing a program where appropriate supports can be provided and are funded for placements that don't necessarily result in an 'outcome' but may build the participant's capacity and career direction.
- The Personnel Group is undecided as to whether community engagement is a true employment pathway. Certainly as part of an evolutionary development program, community activity is a skills builder, and maybe better aligned to a revamped payment structure that rewards progress by the provider with the client (similar to the use of ParentsNext STAR program)

1.3 How can a future disability employment program better align with other programs such as NESM and CDP.

- NESM and DES services are two different tailored pathways for clients, they should be stand alone yet complimentary – the difference is the assessed support need. DES should not be a 'line item' in NESM, this would dilute the program intent. There should be transition from NESM to DES where it is identified that additional supports are required. There must be clear pathways to DES for clients who 'fail up' to DES from NESM through their participation in either ES or Online.
- DES and NDIS should be closely aligned, DES providers should automatically have NDIS accreditation, having already gained DSC accreditation to hold their Contracts.
- CDP is an outlier to 'mainstream' programs – digital, ES and DES and must remain independent and focused on the most vulnerable of Australian citizens.

1.4 What is the role of the NDIS in supporting employment pathways, and how can this complement a future DES program?

- DES providers should be the organisations providing NDIS employment supports to avoid duplication between programs.
- SLES must be reviewed to ensure all providers of this NDIS line item are focused on work experience and employment, in addition to capacity building. A major change needs to occur in this space – work experience should be the KPI within SLES.
- NDIS funding should purchase DES services, if the person is only seeking short hour's employment (benchmark 0-7).
- NDIS funding used for potential DES participants to obtain supported employment, with a continuum of skills development and capacity building to move to open employment. Unfortunately many NDIS participants who move to an ADE stay there.



TOPIC TWO

How can we
simplify entry
to the
disability
employment
support
model?



2. How can we simplify entry to the disability employment support model?

2.1 How can the assessment process be improved to connect people with disability to the right employment service.

- System resourced well enough to enable prompt support, lengthy delays in assessment lead to disengagement and frustration.
- Evidence collection could be based on existing, government held information – myhealthrecord – with participant permission.
- Tweaking and behind the scenes changes to impairment tables and scaling of need, should be done through consultation and be transparent.
- DES program deliverables could be segregated based on length of need for capacity building.
- Services Australia (ESAt assessors) must have the skills to advise DES participants of what the program is and more importantly WHY they are being referred. Assessors need a broader understanding of disability types to enable effective referral to the 'right' service.

2.2 What should be considered during the assessment process when determining support required to help a person reach their work potential

- Benchmark hours removed, many jobseekers use this to not work to their full potential, many providers only look for benchmark hour jobs.
- Cost of disability must be factored into assessments – to enable the person to survive financially should they find employment.
- Ability to use public transport – but more importantly is there public transport in their town. This is a vital missing piece, especially in rural and remote settings – how will someone get to work.
- If a job suits the person, it is a job. Parameters around future capacity building would need to be in place for PPS/OS, not just current job support. This is linked to regular ESAt assessments.
- Clear advice to participant early on, regarding the duration of support to be delivered – referred for a full program, or part program.

2.3 How can the assessment process stream the individual with disability toward the right type of employment support, depending on the need and goal?

- Better provider information available to jobseekers at Services Australia
- Reinstate market share to DES – providers then focus correctly on support not attraction.
- ESAts available face to face and supported by the DES
- A large review of government thinking is required if an individual's needs and goals are to be considered – current framework is about job readiness not individual needs and goals.
- NDIS is an automatic feeder program to DES – no Services Australia involvement, i.e. no ESAt

2.4 Are there different assessments needed at different stages of an individuals' work journey, as they prepare for work, find and maintain employment and progress their career?

- Every individual arrives at DES with an assessment from an independent body (ESAt via Centerlink) that documents their barriers and purpose for being referred to DES. DES should not be required to apply additional assessments to this until these are addressed. It is nonsensical to immediately have to overlay a disingenuous assessment.
- Post ESAt barriers being addressed, there needs to be a series of capability and capacity assessments undertaken at various key points in an individual's progression. These assessments should not be linear, but based on the individual's needs. Government endorsed (not necessarily provided) set of appropriate tools needs to be in place for the government to validate that the individual is progressing.
- Sharing of industry best practice in capacity building innovation needs to occur, won't occur in a competitive market situation.
- Self advocacy training.



TOPIC THREE

What
employment
services and
supports
would most
help people
with disability?



3. What employment services and supports would most help people with disability?

3.1 What has been your experience of receiving employment support from a DES or other employment services provider? What was good about the support? What improvements would you recommend?

- Participants report a very strong preference to face to face servicing, especially those with a mental health condition.
- Staff must be trained in building resilience, mentoring and mental health first aid as a minimum.
- Participants must see that they are moving closer to having their identified barriers addressed and towards employment at every appointment.
- Participants must know the DES is there to assist them with barrier mitigation and a pathway to employment and a career – not be the administrator of the Social Security Act on the Government's behalf.

Feedback⁴ from participants, includes:

- Deb from Benalla is kind and thoughtful. She has offered supports and I'm grateful to the company for going the extra mile."
- "Allira has not only supported me through employment but has help me find accommodation. She has gone above and beyond."
- "Great communication by the girls. Enjoy their planning and decision making in choices for work for me. Big tick"
- "Ben is a great communicator. Very quick actions and always does what he says he is going to do."

3.2 What type of services and support would best help a person with disability find and keep a suitable job, and progress their career? Who should provide this support?

- Face to face service provided by well trained, knowledgeable and experienced consultants
- A new industry standard for staff should be implemented – endorsed by both the Government and potentially a peak body – e.g. Disability Employment Australia.
- Caseload size expectations could be mandated.
- Quality supports generally fall into 3 categories: capacity building (supporting the participant to overcome barriers), employment search support (helping them to find, apply for and to gain a job) and post placement support (support for participant and employer to ensure the job is long lasting).

3.3 What education and training opportunities help people with disability overcome the entry barriers to employment

- Soft skill training that is relevant to industry as well as generic, is critical. Employers regularly report that they are willing to employ under skilled candidates, provided they have soft skills – and in particular, work ethic.
- Work experience and exposure to real work environments are valued highly by employers and should be a central part of any program.
- Program participants should be required to be completing a combination of capacity building, relevant education and work experience as the core components of their support.

3.4 How can people receiving DES also be supported to address other barriers to employment (eg health service or housing assistance).

- Referral should be core functionality of a DES service. DES providers must have strong connections with referral sources within their local communities. Colocation, case conferencing, and two-way referral are all best practice within DES.

3.5 What employment support do mature age people with disability need to successfully gain or retain employment or transition into new employment or a new career?

- Digital literacy training
- Navigating modern recruitment processes.
- Self Advocacy skills
- Identification of transferable skills.
- Jobseekers who are of an age where they are not interested in working and are in a holding pattern prior to receiving the Age Pension should not be referred to DES.

⁴ Participant comments received via TPG Rate It survey, week ending December 26, 2021



TOPIC FOUR

What
employment
services and
supports
would most
help young
people?



4. What employment services and supports would most help young people?

4.1 What support do young people with disability need to successfully move out of education into suitable work?

- Early intervention and relevant work experience.
- An out of school hours job or completing supported work experience placements are evidenced to lead to sustainable employment later in life.
- Soft skill development in employer/work expectations and ethics.
- Curriculum more tailored to hands on experiences.
- DES providers are part of planning in schools from Year 9.
- Emphasis needs to be placed on assistance from DES providers to support a young person to obtain their first employment opportunity, no matter the industry or times of that work. For many youth, especially PWD, their first job can set the tone for their working life, and the restrictions placed in the Eligible School Leaver Guidelines with not only who can be eligible for service, and the need for additional justification to look at employment around the ESL's schooling is at odds with the goals of the programme.
- Every headspace should have a DES as a consortium member to work alongside the mental health supports.

4.2 What best practices from existing DES or other employment programs help young people with disability find and maintain a job?

- The Personnel Group works extensively in schools at present despite their being little financial or performance benefit in the program design.
- Self advocacy training.
- Program is focused on work development skills and ethics, through formal and informal sessions. Programs/products such as Career Voyage and Esher House build awareness and capabilities in young people. Self-advocacy training would be beneficial.
- Staff working with young people should have Youth Mental Health First Aid training and Youth Mentoring skills.

4.3 Should there be assistance to prepare young people to think about work much earlier than after they leave school?

Absolutely. The Personnel Group would advocate strongly that completing pre-emptive work with students prior to leaving school has a significant impact to their long-term employment prospects. Research states that a young person with disability who undertakes paid out of school hours work, is more likely to remain employed or find employment post school.

4.4 How can disability employment services work better with the education system to enhance employment prospects for young people?

- School interventions should be as early as possible. Employment and the choices income brings needs to be part of the future of all young people.
- Parent/carer – school – DES to have constant flow of information. DES have responsibility for advocating employment as an option/pathway and how/who can assist to support the young person.
- Government advocated approach to raising employer awareness of the value of meaningful work experience – outcome deliverables through either skills or knowledge acquisition – no parking of young people in non-relevant jobs to get them out of school.
- Career advisor education on DES/NDIS.

The previous DES ability to deliver the full range of DES supports to young people whilst at school, was successful and should be reinstated. All DES providers were 'penalised' for the actions of a rogue few who were abusing this program. More importantly young people in school are now severely disadvantaged.



TOPIC FIVE

What support do employers need to attract, employ, and retain people with disability?



5. What support do employers need to attract, employ, and retain people with disability?

5.1 What are the most important things that can be done to build an employer's confidence to employ a person with disability?

The single most important factor in changing employer confidence is positive experience. Employers are often influenced by negative preconceptions based on media reports or historic experience that was less than favorable.

The Personnel Group has had many experiences where a previously hesitant employer has had a positive experience, and then gone on to employ more participants. Equally – a poor experience might result in the same employer refusing to give further opportunities.

A positive experience generally comes from the level of support given by the service provider, and the work readiness of the participant. This is why The Personnel Group does not put forward participants for a role where it isn't confident the participant can be successful, regardless of the financial or rating impact. Damaging an employer relationship through a poor experience, has a much bigger impact than a single outcome. Employers need confidence in the employment services system, both mainstream and DES – is the person 'right fit', will they get the support promised, understanding what a wage subsidy is designed for – not to pay them to take a person on, but rather an offset to the initial costs of training. A wage subsidy is not because the person has 'barriers', it is to support an opportunity for that individual to learn a skill and be of benefit to their employer.

Tangible Disability Awareness Training and mental health training for interested Employers.

5.2 What services and supports does a disability employment support service need to offer employers to enable them to recruit people with disability, maintain their employment promote career growth?

A provider must build an ongoing meaningful relationship/partnership. They should provide onsite support, not just phone servicing. They should support job redesign and workplace modifications. They are a recruitment support to an employer but must be willing to pass on the opportunity to another provider or find external candidates if they do not have an appropriate candidate themselves.

5.3 What are examples of good practice employer engagement and employer led initiatives that have been shown to improve employment outcomes for people with disability? How could these be scaled in the DES program?

'Employer 1' 'Project Kids' in Griffith

Employer 1 is a large food services manufacturing employer in the Murray Riverina Region. TPG and Employer 1 worked together to create a program for disengaged youth, known as 'Project Kids' to support participants entering the workforce for the first time. Due to a deep understanding of Employer 1's business, TPG had a high conversion rate of interview to employment. Support was provided to ensure the participants were at ease and presented well. TPG staff worked with the new employees and their supervisors to address any issues and to develop required work skills. TPG developed a tailored training program for participants with their relevant line manager.

Employer 1 is situated out of town and with many young people unlicensed or without transport, a car-pooling system was initiated. Employer 1 provided allowances for specific shifts that lined up with a ride share. This program has seen 30 participants gain fulltime employment across a variety of roles.

'Employer 2' in ACT

Employer 2, an innovative ACT based business who design technology for autonomous vehicles, identified a particular task that required highly repetitive, detail-oriented work. TPG identified that this work could be completed successfully by participants diagnosed with Autism who struggle with roles requiring interpersonal skills but thrive in high detail environments. A program was developed including training for participants, and supports to the employer.

A large number of participants were employed through the program, who would have ordinarily found it challenging to obtain employment due to their barriers.



‘Employer 3’ in Kiewa

TPG, Albury City Council and Wodonga TAFE developed a partnership to operate a café style business as a social enterprise, known as ‘Employer 3’. The concept was to develop a youth friendly, hang out spot that would concurrently provide training and work experience opportunities to disadvantaged cohorts including people with a disability and disengaged youth.

16 people were employed under the initiative.

‘Employer 4’ in Kiewa

TPG worked in partnership with Employer 4 to support participants with Autism to gain and maintain employment at the Australian Tax Office in Albury.

The ATO employed 4 participants who met the requirements of the program. The participants were supported by TPG to integrate into the workforce, and workplace modifications were organized to ensure the workplace environment gave the participants maximum chance of success. Participants were initially provided with onsite support, and later through fortnightly catchup meetings. Eventually the participants were exited as independent workers and remain employed at the ATO.

‘Employer 5’ in 3 ESAs

TPG has partnered with a franchisee who owns 7 stores across 3 Employment Regions. TPG provides highly active support to this employer, including completing regular recruitment campaigns, and extensive onsite support to participants.

An example of a specific initiative was a recruitment / welcome day, held at Employer 5 which allowed Employer 5 to gain 40 potential candidates to apply, be interviewed and get insight into store operations. This store was only getting 3 applications a week but this initiative exposed the employer to more applicants and from this day 10 staff were hired.

‘Employer 6’ in multiple ESAs

Employer 6 is a large cleaning business that operates across regional Victoria and NSW. This business is continually growing and has been supported to meet its emerging labour needs through its relationship with TPG.

TPG has a deep understanding and long standing relationship with Employer 6, allowing it to provide the right supports the employer needs. TPG understands their preferences for experience, qualification and attitude, allowing it to prescreen potential employees to ensure they align with these requirements.

The employer understands clients come from vulnerable backgrounds and gives them multiple chances and support to ensure they can progress with employment. TPG works closely with the employer and participants to overcome a variety of barriers that arise along the way.

Employer 6 has employed more than 50 participants across multiple ESAs.

‘Employer 7’ in Kiewa

Employer 7 is a large animal manufacturing facility in Albury Wodonga. This employer appreciated TPG taking the time to learn about their specific business requirements to develop a recruitment process that met their needs. TPG pre-screens potential candidates, arranges for required medical clearances, supports participants on paid work trials and at their employment commencement.

More than 30 participants have been employed by Employer 7 during this DES contract period, and several of their existing employees registered with TPG through the Work Assist / Jobs in Jeopardy program. Employer 7 staff attend TPG’s Employer Reference Groups and have become advocates of disability employment within their community.

5.4 What other information, services and supports do employers need to support employees with disability?

- PWD are capable employees – just have a different set of circumstances surrounding them.
- Employers need to understand that the person with a disability is their employee – not the DES’s, and must have the same conditions, environment as other staff. Employers may require relevant disability or mental health training, ability to access external supports such as workplace modifications, understanding of industrial relations requirements, and genuine understanding of the participant’s support needs.
- Wage subsidy is not because the person has a disability – it’s to alleviate any additional training costs involved in employing this individual to learn a specific task.
- The DES is in a partnership, supporting both the employer and their new employee – working both sides of the fence for a positive outcome.



TOPIC SIX

How do we best tailor mutual obligation requirements to increase the likelihood of people with disability finding work in the future?



6. How do we best tailor mutual obligation requirements to increase the likelihood of people with disability finding work in the future?

6.1 What specific assistance or flexibilities would better support people with disability to meet their mutual obligation requirements?

- TPG fully understands the importance of incentivizing and driving welfare recipients generally, to actively seek employment but mutual obligation has no direct bearing on finding work in the future – desire to work, capacity building, addressing individual barriers does.
- TPG would argue that the DES program and mutual obligations should not be linked, or that any link is of an 'opt-in' nature. It is critical to a successful DES program that program participants choose to access the service and are not forced to engage.
- DES success relies on the building of trust – DES being both the supporter (providing guidance and employment pathways) and enforcer (mutual obligations) does not work.
- Job Plans are the underpinning document for building capacity and forward thinking, unfortunately, they are the mutual obligation compliance tool also as it dictates what must be undertaken to meet social security law. This does not work for the participant nor the DES. Mutual obligations must be separated and returned to Services Australia.

6.2 How should a future program consider other forms of participation and engagement, such as voluntary work or community engagement?

- Voluntary work and community engagement are existing drivers for certain welfare recipients. A PWD should be able to choose the capacity building they need, and if it is volunteer work, then they should meet mutual obligations (for a period of time).
- Volunteer work and community engagement activity must be linked to a future employment pathway.



TOPIC SEVEN

How can
funding
arrangements
incentivise
good work
outcomes?



7. How can funding arrangements incentivise good work outcomes?

7.1 How could future funding arrangements ensure services across a continuum of work readiness, placement and retention are tailored to the needs of the participant?

- TPG agrees in principle with risk adjusted funding, but the reality is often inaccurate. There have been repeated examples where participants who genuinely need a lot of support have lower funding levels than others who need very little. For example, School leavers repeatedly attract Funding level 1, yet the Department's own Guidelines state that they would expect a school leaver would require extensive support to get and keep a job.
- TPG would suggest a pick list of deliverables in play, similar to line items available through the NDIS but with some from DES funding and some from other sources.

7.2 What are the right pricing and funding arrangements, balancing provider viability with the cost of delivering high quality services to participants and employers?

TPG would state that current funding arrangements are generally sufficient, however as described above – the assessment is not quite right. More work needs to be done to ensure that participants requiring more assistance are funded appropriately. There should also be consideration given to ensure that funding does not disincentivize support of particular cohorts. For example, it is widely understood that School Leavers and clients with Mental Health as a primary disability generally attract a lower funding level, thus providers do not currently spend as much time attracting and supporting these cohorts.

7.3 How could the future funding model be adapted to recognise changes in the labour market and types of employment available in the modern Australian Economy?

- Each provider in a region should achieve certain absolute outcomes, based on caseload size and individual labour market characteristics, Similar to Transition to Work, outcomes should be set quarterly with a nominal % increase required each year to drive efficiencies.
- There should be one set wage subsidy for all jobseekers who have been unemployed for a period of time allowing for consistency in what's available to an employer.

7.4 How can service quality and expertise be rewarded and balanced against quantity of outcomes.

- The department should measure timeliness to job, considering capacity building time that is required as well, could be linked to the risk adjusted funding model.
- Whilst higher funding levels assist in capacity building, it is still over a longer period of time – having increased \$ does not expedite the process of capacity building.
- Greater emphasis should be placed on Disability Support Certification. Is this robust enough? Are providers failed on not achieving this? Are providers genuinely assessed on this?

7.5 How could funding arrangements for ongoing support be improved to ensure supports and services are tailored to the needs of the participant and the employer

- Ongoing support is a critical component of participants obtaining a career rather than just a short-term job. Ethical providers use this time to continue building capacity in the participant and genuinely supporting the employer, where others use this time as a cash cow. This should be managed by firstly ensuring providers delivering the contract are actually specialised in delivering employment supports to people with disability, and then are overseen with strong contract management including regular quality checks.

7.5 What do good providers currently do to support people with disability into work.

- Build a trusting relationship with participant and employer.
- Put the participant first not the Contract.
- Have strong community and business links.
- Don't look for the quick win – right job for the right person.
- Understand onsite training and deliver this to actually show true benefit to the employer.





Participant Employment Journeys

Employment Goals	Long Term Suitable Employment
Personal History & Barriers	<p>Client was a direct registration through Client Attraction Officer.</p> <p>His primary disability is Cerebral Palsy and secondary diagnosis of Depression. He also suffers with symptoms of anxiety, though not clinically diagnosed.</p>
Non-TPG Services Sourced / Referred	<p>“Two States Driving Rehab” for assistance with driving lessons to obtain open license.</p> <p>Contact with client’s mother with regards to alterations required on NDIS plan to drive client success and changing needs.</p>
“Job Ready” Activities and Supports	Financial support with driving lessons and obtaining medical evidence to apply for an open license.
Job Search Activity (interviews, Employer responses, outcomes)	Client approached TPG for assistance with employment. He came with a plan that he wanted to work in the same Doctor’s Clinic where his mother works, but was difficult due to physical barriers from Cerebral Palsy (client uses a walking frame) as well as having a restricted license that only allowed him to drive within 5km of his home address due to lethargy (the clinic is 40km from his home).
Workplace Support (preparation, modifications, on-site training etc.)	<p>WSC spent time onsite with her client for his first shifts, to ensure he settled in well and wasn’t anxious leading up to his commencement. WSC conducted three months’ worth of transportation to and from work three times a week so he was able to secure his position with the clinic, he had been unable to access transportation elsewhere. WSC worked closely with his disability licensed driving instructor to ensure he attended his driving lessons. WSC encouraged and supported client to obtain the required medical evidence for the license application and he has now received his full license and can transport himself to and from work independently.</p> <p>With a license he has been able to make himself available for more than his benchmark hours at work. With an 8-hour benchmark with interventions, the client is now working 12-15 per week independently.</p> <p>WSC has organised Workplace Modifications that include, a mechanical desk chair so he is able to work on the front reception desk of the Clinic as well as safely use his chair at his designated desk in the back office to reduce the risk of falls when transferring from his frame to his chair. WSC has also organised a new ramp to be concreted as well as a safe pathway from the building to the car park. WSC is continuously following up workplace modification progress and ensuring he is working safely in the meantime whilst waiting for modifications to be complete.</p>
Employer and Co-Worker Rapport	WSC has regular contact with Clinic manager to seek feedback and offer onsite support where she feels it is needed. The workplace has been extremely supportive of Client and his barriers, and go above and beyond to ensure he is safe and comfortable at work. WSC provided Disability Discrimination Act information to the site manager as she requested help in regards to car parking. His manager is in the process of negotiating disability



	discrimination act with the local council to have an additional disabled car park located closer to the clinic for the client to utilise on his working days.
Other Outcomes (e.g. if Employment is not achieved or ongoing)	The client has passed his probation period and is now contracted to long term permanent part-time work with the option to become full time once modifications are complete. WSC has worked closely with the client to overcome his anxiety, ensures he debriefs with WSC about his emotions and has helped the client with his NDIS package. This was useful for WSC as she was able to seek informative information from a NDIS worker to relay back to the client so he was able to set his package up to suit him and his employment. He now has access to employment benefits and has had modifications done to his car to be able to drive it to his desired destinations.



Participant Employment Journeys

Employment Goals	Truck Driver, however medical condition made this unviable. Retail position became the new goal.
Personal History & Barriers	<p>Participant has had barriers from birth with a diagnosed learning disability. His relationship with his partner, for whom he was also carer, had broken down. As a result of the relationship breakdown he had very limited access to his 5-year-old son and has been through legal channels to be able to see his boy.</p> <p>Participant has been struggling with additional health barriers since 2002 starting with Arthritis in the spine, then being diagnosed with PTSD, Social Anxiety, Depression, Borderline Personality Disorder and Chronic Suicidal Ideation. This has been coupled with emotional instability, anger and depression as well as a history of self-harm.</p> <p>Participant was referred to The Personnel Group after having a bad experience with a previous provider, so was hesitant in trusting anyone and very suspicious.</p>
Non-TPG Services Sourced / Referred	<p>Participant is now registered with the NDIS, Psychiatrist, Psychologist and connected with his GP.</p> <p>Participant was engaged with an NDIS provider from whom he was not receiving care and support, in addition they appeared to be exploiting him. They were insisting he do volunteer work whilst on a medical certificate for his mental health and told him if he didn't attend things wouldn't be easy for him.</p>
"Job Ready" Activities and Supports	<p>The Employment Consultant (EC) was only in his fourth week at TPG when he met Participant. Participant was unsure about changing EC's and was a little shy and reserved when they had the first appointment.</p> <p>Participant and EC spoke at length about his barriers and history and by treating him with respect and compassion, Participant became more forth coming and engaged well with the EC. Participant worked extremely hard on his barriers, especially his social anxiety, the EC was in contact with Participant up to four times a week to ensure he was OK and coping. Participant had his ups and downs and contacted the EC one evening saying he wanted to throw himself off the rail bridge. They spoke for long time and Participant</p>



	calmed down, ever since the EC and Participant have engaged completely and have a wonderful understanding.
Job Search Activity (interviews, Employer responses, outcomes)	Once Participant overcame his social anxiety he embraced the job searching/interview roles and was rewarded with employment at the Reject Shop, and has now moved on to Big W and is very happy and content in this role.
Workplace Support (preparation, modifications, on-site training etc.)	Participant was contacted twice daily for the first week of his employment then the WSC visited Participant at work as did the ERC and the EC. Constant contact was kept with Participant's manager and any problems were dealt with immediately.
Employer and Co-Worker Rapport	Participant had instant rapport with his employer as his manager had been through a similar situation to Participant.
Other Outcomes (e.g. if Employment is not achieved or ongoing)	EC helped Participant change NDIS service providers and sourced a new Psychologist, which also helped Participant improve his mental health and wellbeing.



Participant Employment Journeys

Employment Goals	Participant had limited employment goals when she came to TPG. Participant had not been able to hold down work for more than a few weeks.
Personal History & Barriers	Diagnosis is PTSD and Major Depressive Disorder. Participant was going through a tough breakup when in employment assistance which saw her struggle with exasperated mental health and housing instability.
Non-TPG Services Sourced / Referred	Participant was referred to housing although that remained non-fruitful. Participant was receiving pastoral care from her church in regards to her mental health so declined referral to allied services.
"Job Ready" Activities and Supports	Continuous job searching, and coaching on expectations of employment.
Job Search Activity (interviews, Employer responses, outcomes)	Participant interviewed well but would run into difficulty once in the placement.
Workplace Support (preparation, modifications, on-site training etc.)	Participant and WSC had many preparation meetings in the lead up to starting her most recent position. WSC encouraged Participant to disclose to her employer in order to receive tailored training at her pace. WSC coached Participant through this.
Employer and Co-Worker Rapport	Participant started at her most recent employer with disclosing in mind. After a few days and speaking to WSC she was comfortable to do this. Her employer responded well.



Other Outcomes (e.g. if Employment is not achieved or ongoing)

Participant has now been in her most recent role for longer than any other position. She has disclosed and is feeling supported by her employer who is making adjustments when it comes to training and working with Participant to achieve ultimate productivity. She works for a Government agency, fielding complaints and feedback from participants.



TOPIC EIGHT

How do we
drive high
quality
services and
supports?



8. How do we drive high quality services and supports?

8.1 How should an effective and efficient competitive provider market be structured and how should business be allocated?

- There should be a small number of providers in each region with an allocated market share and tolerances.
- Providers setting up, moving on, merging, selling their business (selling clients!) etc are all a waste of money, and destroy the broader reputation of DES Services.
- It is evidenced that open market contributes to an environment that does not promote the sharing of best practice, genuinely holistic servicing, and overall industry improvement.
- An 'activation' bench of providers needs to be current and used to improve services to participants.

8.2 How can the future program settings encourage and reward innovation and continuous improvement? What works well in the current program?

- Industry research, combination of provider/government financing to put forward best practice and trials.
- Greater links with industry bodies for knowledge on future jobs.

8.3 What arrangements should be in place for market regulation and quality assurance of services?

- Departmental DES managers are specialists in this program, not stretched across many.
- DSC accreditation requires higher levels for achievement, strong participant/employer voice.
- Timely data flow upon which providers can enact improvement plans.

8.4 What legal model would be most appropriate to manage the terms and conditions of the agreement between government and disability employment service providers?

- 5 year terms with no Provider Panel – its usefulness has not been confirmed in the current Contract. An 'activation' bench could be implemented, a group of providers who are constantly involved in discussion with the department as to their ability to 'drop in' with say, three months' notice, not able to do this, removed from bench.
- Transparency around tender scoring and allocation of business.
- Known, supported key measurement points.

8.5 What is needed to lift workforce capability and the quality of the workforce delivering disability employment services and supports for both participants and employers?

- Disability Employment accreditation is vital to upskill the workforce.
- Co-design of mandatory qualifications by Department/Training/peak provider, e.g. DEA.
- Disability Employment Services (and more broadly Employment Services) to be on the skills shortage list, allowing access to government funded spots.

8.6 Is there a market need for specialist providers (disability/industry/age cohorts) that would increase employment opportunities?

Yes, where a provider can demonstrate there is a specific need, and that they have significant expertise in providing services to a specific cohort.



TOPIC NINE

How do we
measure
success?



9. How do we measure success?

9.1 What will success look like for:

- a) **People with disability**
Improved capacity, employment, career development and ongoing support.
- b) **The community**
Reduced welfare dependence, greater community participation.
- c) **Employers**
Workforce diversity, ease of recruitment, genuine support and assistance.
- d) **Service providers**
Simplicity of system, genuine contract management, achievement of purpose.
- e) **Government**
Return on investment, reduced welfare dependence.

9.2 What data do we need to know if the program has been effective?

- Number of people with disability commencing and retaining work each year.
- Reduction in Government welfare spend for said people.

9.3 How can people with disability, employers and providers help to measure and report on the performance of the new program?

- Feedback from all cohorts on service experience.
- % of referrals to each provider but understanding why – is the provider very good at its work, or are they working outside the intent of open market.
- Absolute outcomes to be achieved – known in advance, with an efficiency overlay of, say, 5% more each year.
- Contract managers working alongside providers to identify issues as they occur to protect the Government's investment.

9.4 What do people with disability and employers need, to make an informed choice to select the best provider for their needs and how should this information be made available?

The Personnel Group would argue that this is not the role of Government and that previous attempts to 'inform user choice' such as connections for quality and published Star Ratings are largely ignored by program participants.

Program participants are often savvy about their provider of choice and generally make their decisions based on reputation or previous experience with a provider. This rightly gives an advantage to providers who are embedded within a community and build generational reputation.

Employers need to trust the Provider, and this is built on long standing relationships and deep understanding and interest in the employer's business. Employers don't want 'fly in fly out' Providers, they need to be able to receive assistance from a Provider, whether to put suitable candidates forward for a vacancy, or to provide 'crisis' and ongoing support. This level of relationship can only be achieved by Providers 'caring' for their employers and not viewing them as a place where they can get an outcome.

Developing deep trusted relationships and subsequent Employer/industry word of mouth is the best way for a Provider to increase their employer base. Any attempts to corral employer experiences would need to be at a local or industry level, not an Australia wide data base of good news stories.

