

About Joblife Employment

Joblife Employment (Joblife) is an experienced employment service provider operating across Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Tasmania and Western Australia. With a focus on supporting people with 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 organisation, Life Without Barriers, and leading employment services company, the Angus Knight Group.

We currently work with over 3000 job seekers across our footprint and have successfully supported over 3800 people into education and to find employment in turn supporting more than 2000 employers to meet their workforce needs

In considering the Department’s discussion paper, Joblife have provided feedback based on our experience in connecting people with disability into work. Our experience gives us considerable insight into what is working, and what is needed to create

We look forward to being part of an ongoing discussion with the Department on the reshaping of disability employment supports to ensure they deliver positive outcomes for individuals and our community.

Please do not hesitate to contact me should you wish to discuss any aspect of this response.

Nunzia Confessore
Chief Executive Officer
Joblife Employment
27 January 2022

About the Cover: The word cloud featured on the front cover of our response highlights the key words featured in Joblife’s response. We believe the prominence of the words people, support, employer, and employment provide strong reflection on those areas which are critical in a successful disability employment support program.

Design Elements for a New Disability Employment Support Program

Joblife support efforts to improve programs and services which will increase the number of people with disability who are actively engaged in employment in our community.

We note that the Discussion Paper offers a case for change which suggests that the current disability employment services are not fit for purpose for the changing labour market and economy, and that it was not delivering services 'efficiently and effectively'. As a current provider of services, Joblife would note that within the current contracting and performance framework, services are delivering a range of quality outcomes. While we agree that there could be improvements offered to aspects of the program's operation, the intention of any reformed program and process should not be to limit access to services or reduce investment in people with disability.

The following details Joblife's position on elements of any future disability employment support program for consideration.

Design Element 1: A dedicated program supporting People with Disability is required

Joblife believe that a **dedicated, purpose designed program** to assist and support people with disability to find and keep work is necessary. Any new program should ensure that people are given the opportunity to access **disability specific support** which meets their needs. This includes ensuring that people living with disability in remote locations can access appropriate support.

Choice and control must be maintained for people with disability accessing employment support services.

Access to such a program must consider the **broad range of disabilities** which can impact on a person's ability to find work. Access to disability employment support should be made available to those people who require additional assistance as a result of their disability requiring assistance to obtain employment. Access to the service should be determined by two key factors:

- The extent to which disability is impacting on their ability to find and keep work. Where it is a key factor, individuals should benefit from access to a disability employment specialist.
- The choice of service sought from the individual. Individuals should be given a choice on if they want to access support from a disability focussed provider, or alternative service.

Design Element 2: Early intervention is critical in achieving results

A disability employment support program should recognise the impact of **early interventions** in supporting people to enter the workforce. This is particularly relevant for **young people living with disability** who are engaged in secondary schooling.

Any reforms should ensure that **young people with disability in school** are able to access employment related supports and early interventions from a reformed service to successfully move out of education and into suitable work.

A key area of need is in the connection between school and work. The current delivery environment sees limited cross over between in school support for young people with disability, and post school employment. Part of this is because of program design, however part also stems from in built institutional issues and connection between State and Commonwealth programs.

A new disability employment support program should work with all levels of Government to allow young people access to much earlier interventions than their last year of school. More education and support for in-school staff on employment related issues and pathways would also be beneficial.

There may be value in considering a specialist program/stream in disability employment supports which focusses only on working with young people. It could include access to young people in school and take learnings from the Transition to Work program evaluation and new program design that considers the measurements of success. These performance measures would vary with an early intervention program versus a program that focuses on young people leaving school.

Design Element 3: Engaging Employers is Critical

A new disability employment support program must recognise the **critical role employer's** play with specific tools in place to encourage their engagement.

A new program should offer sufficient **flexibility to enable service providers** to engage and interact with employers in a way which enables access to employment opportunities.

This must be supplemented by **additional supports** and levers from Government such as employer focused **communication and education campaigns, tools and advice**, and Government **procurement targets** which encourage and create access to employment opportunities. Wage subsidies aligned in value with other Employment programmes would help ensure a clear and consistent offer to employers.

Design Element 4: Training and education are valuable contributors to building motivation, self-esteem and employability and should be included in a new program

Access to **training and education** for people with a disability to enable them to access work opportunities in the future is a valuable intervention which should be encouraged and recognised in service delivery.

Recognition of the value of training and education should be maintained in the program. Skilling is critical in terms of both accessing employment for people with disability, but also in terms of increasing the skills base within the country. Education outcomes should continue therefore to play an important part of the program. Where education leads directly to employment within a period, the Department should consider an incentive/bonus.

Design Element 5: Lived experienced with disability should be valued in service delivery

A new program should **encourage** and **reward** service providers for building their own **workforce to include people with disability** noting the benefits in terms of quality-of-service delivery as well as through the creation of direct employment opportunities.

From a program and systems perspective, Government should take a more active role in supporting the capability of services to build their workforce. Reinvesting in supports such as an IT systems training database, face to face training with Department staff and modules in the Learning Centre must be prioritised.

Design Element 6: Market Regulation enabling quality service delivery

In Joblife's view, to ensure an effective and efficient competitive market in a new disability employment support program, choice for people with disability and service viability must be balanced.

A market share arrangement should be introduced to ensure that contracted providers are given opportunity to operate with a degree of certainty in delivery. This will encourage investment, contribute to staff retention, and ensure services are focussed on engagement and employment placement. Within this, Government can still offer choice to people with disability and employers through providing multiple service providers in a region.

Design Element 7: Any service must be funded in a manner which supports high quality interventions and long-term outcomes

There are **significant costs** associated with delivering specialized employment related supports in a meaningful and sustainable way. Any program must recognise the **expertise** required and **investment needed** to deliver high quality employment and support services, including the need to support both in early interventions, and long-term outcomes.

Joblife have considered several ways in which future funding arrangements could ensure services across a continuum of work readiness, placement and retention are tailored to the needs of the participant.

Any funding model should be simplified to assist in service delivery. While in theory the current DES model seeks to have funding commensurate with need, the multiple payment levels and points are unnecessarily complex in practice.

Attention must be paid to the balance between what are traditionally known as service fees and outcome fees. Given the front-end investment required in supporting people into work, there should be sufficient funding provided to recognise this effort. Providers should continue however to be incentivised to place people with disability into meaningful and sustainable employment.

Any funding a pricing must consider:

- The front-end work required to engage and undertake the necessary work preparation for clients and engagement with employers
- Market share arrangement to support viability
- Striking the right balance between service fees and outcomes.

Design Element 8: Appropriate contracting, performance arrangements and systems should be in place to support service delivery

To ensure **stability** in service provision, **long term contracts** should be provided to services. Contract allocation should take into consideration the ongoing **viability of services**. Procurement arrangements should recognise high performance and consider opportunities such as Invitation to Treat (or similar) to minimise disruption.

Performance frameworks should be **clear, transparent**, and focused on those elements which **drive success** in service delivery.

To enable service delivery, any disability employment support program must be supported by a **purpose-built IT system** and **reporting** to enable service delivery.