



A new disability employment services model

Response to the consultation paper

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About MAX Solutions

MAX Solutions delivers life-changing opportunities with positive outcomes for individuals and employers through:

- MAX Employment, Australia's largest employment service provider
- Injurynet, which provides quality workplace medical services and
- Assessments Australia, which provides independent health assessment services.

Internationally, we have experience operating in employment services and health services in the USA, UK, Canada, Saudi Arabia, Singapore, Sweden, Italy and South Korea through our parent company, MAXIMUS.

Our core business is helping customers develop the skills they need to find sustainable employment, no matter their background or circumstance. MAX has over 20 years of experience assisting people to build their capacity and improve their lives through employment or training. We deliver a range of Australian Government funded programs such as jobactive, Disability Employment Services (DES), School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES), ParentsNext, and State Government funded services including the Opportunities Pathways Program, the Jobs Victoria Employment Service and the Victorian Program for Students with Disabilities-Assessment Service. Through our case management and assessment services we work with over 150,000 people every year.

As one of the largest employment services providers in Australia, our sphere of influence extends far and wide across the country. We have more than 1,800 employees servicing more than 250 locations, covering every state and territory.

We work across Australia with employers, community partners, support organisations and our customers. By working together, we help people see a different future for themselves.

Every person who walks through our doors provides an opportunity to make a difference. Our employment, health and training services, delivered within local communities provides important support to individuals and their families.

We are proud to live in and be a part of the communities we serve across every state and territory in Australia.



Introduction

We thank the Department of Social Services for the opportunity to provide comment on the proposed disability employment support program. Our comments and suggestions come from over 20 years of experience as a disability employment service provider as well as a range of other disability programs such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme's School Leaver Employment Support service, the Vocational Intervention Program, the Integrated Employment Program and the National Panel of Assessors. We have a broad range of expertise and experience in issues relating to the interaction between disabilities, health conditions and employment, covering employment support programmes, vocational rehabilitation, occupational health, employer engagement and effective assessment.

The environment has changed significantly for people with disability with the introduction of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) and government policy is continuing to adapt with the recently announced National Disability Strategy and the National Disability Employment Strategy. It will continue to change with the recommendations arising from the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability. The changes to the environment are further complicated for people with disability by the COVID-19 pandemic, the labour market has changed with more working from home opportunities, increased contract work and portfolio careers and the larger gig economy.

A threshold issue that has flow on impacts to our response to this consultation is the dichotomy around mutual obligation. With 78% of the Disability Employment Services (DES) caseload on activity tested income support, they are subject to mutual obligation requirements and we acknowledge the feedback stated in the consultation paper. However, as a DES provider, we are legally obliged to provide services in line with the DES Funding Agreement and to uphold mutual obligation in line with Social Security legislation. As a result, we believe it is up to Government to recommend changes to government policy to allow DES participants flexibility and freedom to find work aligned to their goals. This is further discussed in Sections 3, 6 and 7.

Another recommendation MAX would like to suggest is the streamlining of the two DES programs to create one disability employment support program. Whilst we understand the differentiation in the programs for the different types of disability, the level of individual support required (and how this may impact servicing), the merging of programs will simplify the program for people with disability, employers and employment services. Providers can service the different types of disability based on the assessment and how each provider responds to the recommended interventions and supports. The ten funding levels could also be simplified (we suggest three bands) and allow for other funding to be allocated to progress payments or bonus payments. This is further discussed in Section 7.

Other recommendations that are discussed further in this paper include:

1. The referral and assessment process for people with disability needs to be clearer to users and articulate the purpose of assessments so a referral to DES is not a surprise and participants understand the purpose of the services they will receive.
2. The SLES program should continue as a work preparation program and that further promotion should occur so all stakeholders understand the program's purpose.
3. That youth with disability will receive DES when ready to look for work unless they are eligible for SLES or Transition to Work where a lack of year 12 completion is inhibiting their job search.

4. The achievement of training is recognised in the performance management framework and disability employment support service funding model
5. All DES participants are given 2 years of services and the 78 week review is abolished, reducing the number of ESAs and saving funds.
6. Greater awareness and increased accessibility to services for those that are already in work and would like to change jobs or careers. As part of this, providers are given access to the Employment Assistance Fund through JobAccess with a streamlined purchasing process.
7. A comprehensive media awareness campaign for employers and the community about the benefits of employing people with disability, dispelling common myths and the range of resources available to assist employers.
8. The number of providers in each ESA should be capped at a level consistent with the size and scale of the ESA. We suggest a cap of 6-12 licences including specialist providers.

The new disability employment support program needs to be flexible to cater for changes to the environment and positive outcomes to be achieved for all stakeholders. We are ready to work collaboratively with the Government on the proposed disability employment support service.

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

All people with disability deserve the right to be able to receive disability employment services suited to their needs. This can vary depending on a person's situation, if they are currently employed, and also if they have lived with disability for a number of years or have recently acquired disability due to an accident or ill health. The services available to people with disability need to cater across the continuum of their needs, this should include if they are currently working and need assistance to progress their career or change jobs.

A future disability employment support program should be flexible to include casual or part time employment as they are an important tool to obtain long term sustainable employment. Many of our participants prefer this type of employment as it provides them with the flexibility to cater for their changing circumstances with their disability and any medical treatment they may be receiving. Whilst casual work may not achieve outcomes under the current DES model, it is an important strategy that providers use to improve a participant's employability through capacity building. In addition, voluntary work, unpaid work experience, internships and training are all important pathways to employment that should be recognised. Completion of these pathways contribute to the achievement of employability outcomes given they would generally not lead to the achievement of Employment Outcomes.

Many of us, particularly those of us with disabilities who have faced persistent discrimination throughout our lives, not least when trying to find employment in the first place, take enormous pride in our hard-fought jobs and careers.

Stella Young

Given the wide range of programs available to assist people with disability, each program's objectives, purpose and eligibility needs to be clear to assessors, Services Australia, participants and stakeholders to understand the reason people are receiving certain services or programs. For example, DES should continue to be a program aimed to assist people with disability into long term sustainable employment and for those that do not satisfy DES, they should receive services under jobactive/the New Employment Services Model.

The cross over between CDP and DES has historically been due to DES not being available in some remote locations. As a result, CDP provided a disability employment service that assisted Indigenous job seekers with disability. Feedback from when MAX delivered CDP was that Indigenous job seekers preferred a culturally appropriate service and primarily identified as an Indigenous job seeker rather than as a person with disability. We are cognisant that CDP is being reviewed and assume any new program to assist Indigenous job seekers would not change their servicing preferences. In addition, in some locations, it may be preferable to the Government that only one program is provided due to the limited economies of scale and financial viability of services in remote locations.

Due to the range of disability services, the interaction with applying for Disability Support Pension (DSP) and applying for National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) services, the purpose and eligibility of each program needs to be differentiated and clearer. It should be agreed by all stakeholders that NDIS employment services are focused on work preparation and DES for those that are "job ready".

As a SLES and DES provider, we find that there is some confusion around SLES eligibility, in particular for young people at school or for those that have left school prior to Year 12. Confusion is also evident around the eligibility process for getting *Finding and Keeping a Job* funding in the NDIS plan. This results in people that would be eligible missing out on services until a provider assists them through the referral process.

The transition between school and employment is a critical phase and young people should be able to receive assistance at school and throughout this critical phase. The success of this transition can have a lasting impact on long term outcomes in the labour market and engaging in the workforce. At school, the young person should be able to receive SLES, or DES depending on their eligibility. School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) through the NDIS is a work preparation support service to assist young people to develop work preparation and employability skills, explore various careers and occupations over a period of up to two years. Whilst it may lead to employment, it is not the overall objective of the service. For school leavers with a disability who are not eligible for the NDIS, their options range from DES, jobactive or Transition to Work depending on their eligibility, barriers and income support. For young people with disability who have not completed Year 12, Transition to Work should be considered as an option. The threshold eligibility requirement with Transition to Work is non completion of year 12. Where their disability is impacting looking for work, the young person should receive DES services and should only be eligible for jobactive/New Employment Services Model as a last resort.

There needs to be more information around options for young people with disability to determine the most appropriate program for their circumstances based on their work capacity, eligibility for the NDIS and their goals, some of which may align better with mainstream employment programs such as DES, jobactive or Transition to Work. There is a lot of confusion around the range of programs available for young people with disability, the assessment process needs to be well-defined, and the purpose of each program needs to be understood by the young person, their parents and other stakeholders.

2. How can entry be simplified?

Assessments

The number and purpose of assessments is very confusing to participants who do not understand or differentiate between government agencies or programs. It can be confusing for a participant applying for Disability Support Pension (DSP), completing multiple assessments in the application process which may also serve as an assessment and referral to DES, particularly when the participant believes they do not have the ability to work.

The DSP application process is a deficit-based model and this should continue to establish the existence of disability, the extent of disability and impacts on a person's ability to work. Assessors should continue to assess work capacity however do not have the expertise to make recommendations on what type of work a person should be looking for and should not be asked to make these recommendations.

The crossover between the Job Capacity Assessment (JCA) and the Employment Services Assessment (ESAt) is confusing and should be simplified. These assessments should be combined and streamlined taking into account any information from the DSP assessment or any existing Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) assessments. These assessments should focus on barriers to determine the level of need and assess which employment program is most appropriate.

The Job Capacity Assessment should continue to make recommendations on the general number of hours that a person is assessed as capable of working with broad interventions. From the consultation paper there is discussion about the ranges provided, the calculation of Outcomes and achievement of working "at capacity". We believe capacity should be at the lower end of the scale or at the median point. Bonuses could be paid to providers if the participant achieves an Outcome based on the upper end of the range.

When a participant is referred to MAX, they are assessed according to our strengths-based approach. Our proprietary Person-Job Fit assessment, which has been in place for almost 10 years, focuses on the participant's current circumstances, their skills and strengths and assesses the barriers that may be impacting their successful job search. The Person-Job Fit informs how services are tailored to the participant and their needs and has been adapted over time to take into account changes to the labour market.



Given the range of assessments and their purpose, we suggest the Department consider how to streamline the assessments during the income support application process, work capacity and what programs are most appropriate. Providers will continue to use this information and their own assessments to tailor the services a participant will receive in disability employment support.

For those applying for DSP, we recommend that their referral to employment services is fast tracked during the income support application process to strengthen their connection with the labour market. This should increase the focus on the participant's ability, rather than the disability they have. It is expected that this would also assist changing a participant's perspective about not being able to work at all and help them to consider their abilities with further assistance, reskilling and rehabilitation.

It should be noted that providers receive significant negative feedback from participants who feel they do not have any capacity to work or may not have capacity due to periods of ill health. Depending on the individual, their attitude and their needs, the Government could consider a change in policy to grant an exemption from looking for work rather than referring them to employment services.

For people already on DSP and other non-activity tested payments, their entry into DES through direct registration is a smooth entry point. In our experience, participants contact MAX, we go through the direct registration process and they can commence in employment services almost immediately.

MAX supports participants having the choice and control of the provider that they receive disability support services from. However, there is insufficient data around the number of participants that make a choice of provider when referred to services, who that choice is and the proportion that do not make a choice. Some providers have made investments in advertising and tools to influence choice and it is difficult to assess the success of these strategies without data. It would be of interest to the Department and providers if active choice and control has an impact on the achievement of long-term sustainable employment. In addition, it would be interesting to see if an ESA's market size impacts participant choice. This could influence the Department's decision on market size and structure as discussed more in Section 8.

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

Types of Services

In our experience, participants respond better when they understand the relevance of services being provided to their circumstances. Our staff have the expertise to assess their skills, their current circumstances and consider a participant's goals and needs to provide advice on how that translates into the services that we can provide. This may range from assistance with job search, providing resume assistance, developing soft skills and employability skills, linking participants with other services and sourcing, or creating employment with local employers aligned to the participant's goals, skills and needs.

The flexibility within DES that allows providers to tailor the services to each individual based on their goals and needs should continue. Employment is multi-faceted and can be impacted by personal relationships, housing, transport, literacy as well as the individual's self-esteem, skills and abilities. We are conscious of feedback from people with disability about over-assessing and continually repeating their story. As a result, we utilise information from the existing assessments and then evaluate during each contact if our case management plan needs to be adapted based on individual circumstances.

CASE STUDY

When MAX met this young participant with autism, communication difficulties, mental and physical health issues, we knew that the Person-Job Fit was key to achieving long term employment. From our assessment, we knew the young person was used to working outdoors as a sporting referee and a job which doesn't require interaction or constant communication would be suitable. The local labour market had a number of construction projects with traffic controller jobs available. We discussed this with the participant, and it was agreed this would be a suitable job with minimal impact on their disability.

Our consultant worked on their employability skills while our allied health professional worked with the young person to manage their mental health, improve their physical health, improve communication skills, and gain vocational direction. Upon placement into traffic control work, MAX met with the young person regularly in person and by phone to review how they were coping with work.

Though the participant experienced some significant challenges including anxiety travelling to work and in communication, our allied health professional and consultant collaborated to assist. They liaised with his employer and linked the participant with further external supports. The team effort has meant that they have improved their resilience, mental health and communication skills and have successfully achieved a 52 week Outcome.

Training

We acknowledge the Department has made changes to Education Outcomes in the current DES program in the last 12 months to encourage DES participants to take up employment rather than

undertaking training. In our experience the completion of Certificate III or above qualifications related to individual goals improves a participant's employability in a chosen role, and importantly, increases confidence, self-esteem and strengthens their linkages to the labour market when combined with relevant work experience. Undertaking training is an important stepping stone to employment and this should be recognised as a milestone towards achievement of Employment Outcomes. There should be recognition in the financial and performance management framework when a participant completes training as part of the overall disability employment support service framework.

Concurrent Services

A key element of disability employment support services that people with a disability need is concurrent complementary services from other stakeholders. As a provider, we have the unique perspective to be able to identify these needs, use our existing relationships to coordinate delivery of services to participants and assess how this is improving employability and work readiness to find suitable employment. This may range from accessing other health services and adaptive technology, housing services, material aid, training or transport assistance. As this is not recorded in ESS web there is no oversight of these interventions and their size. We believe that it is appropriate that a DES provider continues to manage these relationships as they have the best oversight of what is appropriate for the participant and to manage their participation along with other interventions/services. Where a participant is receiving services prior to commencement in employment services, with permission we liaise with the service provider to deliver a complementary and coordinated service.

Program Reviews

In the current delivery of Disability Employment Services, the 78 week review is a point where an ESAt is required to provide a further 6 months of service delivery. In the majority of cases, the ESAt confirms this and a participant receives services for the remainder of two years.

This process can cause complications as the participant is exempted when they reach 78 weeks if an ESAt has not yet been conducted. This can be delayed due to Services Australia capacity issues and can cause a pause in servicing for some time. This is an opportunity for the Government to remove the 78 week review as the majority of participants continue in DES until they reach the limit. This would reduce the number and costs of ESAts and allow providers the full two years of service delivery without interruption. Where circumstances change, providers would still have the ability (as they do now) to refer the participant at any time for an ESAt.

CASE STUDY

MAX provides concurrent mental health support and employment services in collaboration with clinical support teams. This is delivered in a number of regions including with Queensland Health in Brisbane South in the Integrated Employment Program (IEP), in the Hunter New England Local Health District with the Support Through Early Psychosis Service (STEPS) and previously in Perth with the Individual Placement and Support (IPS) program.

In these programs we work together with clinical support teams including Case Managers, Occupational Therapists and Psychologists in local health districts assisting people with significant and on-going mental health conditions to engage in employment.

We deliver our services both in local health district clinics and our employment service offices. We co-locate, making ourselves available to participants in clinics when ready to engage in employment. This provides the participant with a familiar face when in our offices (if appropriate) and builds informal working relationships for information sharing with the clinical team. Working as an integrated employment and health service team with participants, we deliver a series of vocational interventions including matching strengths with suitable jobs; resume building; developing learning aids such as job task prompt cards; and liaising with employers to develop and review comprehensive workplace support plans.

We attend clinical review meetings as part of the integrated team working with a participant, providing the formal situation to exchange ideas and develop consistent approaches to delivering services. This approach ensures communication and consistency of service is embedded into the delivery of the program to the benefit of the participant.

Digital Services

A key feature of MAX's DES service is the online assistance offered through our MAXConnect platform empowering users to be matched to jobs from our network of 30,000 employers, update their resume and access articles on job search related topics such as cover letters, interviews, referees. Where our DES participants do not have skills to use online platforms, we provide Digital Literacy training delivered by our qualified trainers to develop these skills to be able to use platforms such as MyGov, Jobsearch and MAXConnect. Our digital literacy training assists across all areas of digital literacy including knowledge of how to use technology, advising on access to technology and improving linkages to digital infrastructure such as wi-fi and the NBN.

If other training is more appropriate, MAX provides training online or face to face or refers to other RTOs. For some participants, there is little benefit from additional training so other strategies are used such as job carving and job redesign which is further outlined in Section 5.

Should the Department consider moving a proportion of DES participants to the Online Employment Service, this should only be done where a person has been fully assessed as digitally literate, have access to a suitable device with reliable internet access. We have concerns that some DES participants do not have the skills to undertake Online Employment Services placing them at risk of being left behind, increasing their disadvantage before they are referred to face to face service delivery.

Post Placement Support

Post Placement Support (we refer to this as In Work Support) and Ongoing Support are very important to long term employment sustainability, particularly supporting employers and the participant within the workplace. We support the continuation of the 52 Week Outcome to ensure a person with disability can achieve long term employment, to manage any changes in the workplace, the role or with their manager over a long period of time.

Funding around In Work Support and Ongoing Support needs to continue to have the flexibility to support all stakeholders – the participant, the manager and the workplace in general. Without the alignment of all three parties, issues can emerge, and a participant's job satisfaction may decline affecting Outcomes. The support needs to be flexible as one stakeholder may need more support than others and at different times, such as when a new process is being implemented in the workplace. Recommendations around Ongoing Support are discussed further in Section 7.

Those already working

The lack of information about services available to people with disability in employment and their employers is a significant issue affecting much of the labour market. Whilst Job Access might be recognisable, the services available are not well known. Both the Work Assist service for those who may be at risk of losing their job and the Employment Assistance Fund for workplace adjustments and or modifications are not well utilised. For some people with disability, they may be hesitant to access these services if their employer is not supportive. These services need better promotion to employers and people with disability. Increasing awareness of the services available should have a positive impact on the economy by retaining and increasing disability employment.

For those that acquire disability or illness whilst employed, they need greater awareness of the services available as well as any health professionals and other stakeholders they may deal with such as WorkCover and insurance agencies. Before their return to work, Work Assist should be utilised to ensure a positive return to work with the correct adjustments in a supportive environment.

Due to the under-utilisation of the Employment Assistance Fund, we suggest that disability employment support service providers have direct access to the Employment Assistance Fund. Currently processes to access supports are slow, complicated for employers and are not able to provide assistance when it is needed. As a result, MAX will often pay for these purchases through our service fees (further discussed in Section 7) to enable participants to be able to undertake a work trial with the correct adjustments and aids to begin a job quickly. For purchases under a certain value, the purchase and reimbursement process could be simplified without transferring the administrative risk to providers.

Once a person with disability is employed and has achieved their 52 week Outcome, apart from Ongoing Support they would receive little support. If a person with disability wished to change jobs, or improve their career, there is no further support available for them and it is up to them to navigate through this change. We recommend that these participants are able to access a time limited disability employment support service. This would allow them to access employment assistance through providers to expand their career and improve their long term prospects.

Providers could be paid Outcomes based on improved salaries or changed stability in their role i.e. going from a casual to permanent part-time position, or from fixed-term contract to permanent. It would minimise the risk where a person changes jobs without any support, resulting in reduced confidence.

Providing additional support to those already employed will encourage people with disability to strive for career advancement rather than wasting productivity by staying in a lower paid job and will contribute increased taxes to the economy, and potentially encourage the employer to bring on other people with disability in the original job.

Mature Age

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare in its People with Disability in Australia 2020 report that the prevalence of disability increases with age and more than doubles between the ages of 65-85+. Many people who acquire disability are mature age. In our experience, the biggest challenge that mature age people face is assistance with dealing with the considerable changes to their life as a result of their newly diagnosed disability and their reaction to this. Our allied health professionals assist people in dealing with these changes including how to cope with the grief, anger, disbelief and confusion as they work out their new normal, the financial impact, the impact on their self-esteem and relationships. It may have also changed their career pathway and ability to perform jobs they have had previously. Through our counselling services we can support a career change aligned to the participants goals, skills and abilities.

CASE STUDY

Losing your own home due to relationship breakdown and being unable to pay the mortgage was not something this 48 year old, DES-ESS participant expected to happen. Already coping with depression and Fibromyalgia, her change in living circumstances and resorting to living in her car impacted her mental well-being and led her to engage in services with MAX.

Based on our internal assessment, her consultant immediately engaged support from our allied health professionals including a Psychologist and Exercise Physiologist for the participant. The participant was able to move in with a friend while trying to obtain a place at the women's refuge on the Gold Coast. She desperately wanted employment to enable her to secure her own rental property. While receiving our allied health services support, her consultant worked with the participant on motivation, confidence and routine.

Together they secured the participant a Call Centre position with Sykes Australia. Assisting with workplace modifications and regular PPS, the participant achieved a 52-week Outcome and moved into her own unit.

4. What services and supports would help young people with a disability in particular?

Champions

Young people with disability need role models. The visibility of people with disabilities like Dylan Alcott and Nas Campanella is a start however, there needs to be more of it. We need to see more diversity across cultures, age and occupations. Young people need examples they can connect with to encourage them to make the steps to find work and know that despite challenges that people may have can secure work that is meaningful to them. Seeing these examples can assist to motivate participants, help them understand what challenges the person may have faced and also provide them with information on how to cope with people that do not understand their disability or other negative experiences. In addition, the promotion of people with disabilities with a focus on their abilities can also counter employer and societal perceptions of people with disabilities, it contributes to increasing disability confidence and adjusting employer biases.



An example of this type of promotion is recently one of our participants, Jarrod Lowerson was invited by ABC Radio National's "This Working Life" podcast to speak about his role at KFC Robina and the support and guidance he has received in the role.

The podcast discussed how hyper personalised workplaces can accommodate neurodiversity and individual skillsets. MAX assisted Jarrod through a pilot program with KFC to match him with a job that best suited him. As a person living with Asperger's Syndrome, Jarrod's high energy levels mean he can

often complete tasks quickly making him a very valuable employee. Jarrod participated in an NWEF placement learning skills on the job, undertook a productivity assessment and was offered a role with KFC. MAX supported Jarrod's managers and Jarrod developing his workplace skills, coaching him on safety and creating props to remind him of tasks to build his efficiency and confidence. Jarrod is a valued member of the KFC team and continues to develop in his role.

Earlier in this paper, we discussed the confusion around program eligibility for young people with SLES and DES. Young people should be referred to the program that best meets their needs. Whether that is DES because they are looking for work or SLES through their NDIS plan for further capacity building activities and supports.

Connections to Work

Young people can often have little or no work experience or networks to employers which makes finding suitable employment more difficult. Combined with some employers who are not disability

confident, this increases the complexity of maintaining sustainable employment. Through MAX's Employer Business Centres, we have developed relationships with a wide range of national employers who are willing to employ people with a disability; some with specific disability employment strategies. This is further outlined in Section 5. We create connections for young people with employers who are aligned to their employment and career goals, whether that is finding work experience or internship opportunities, finding casual or part time employment or working directly with the employer to design a job that utilises the young person's abilities. As a provider, our strong relationships enable us to work closely with the employer and continue that support to the participant and their manager/ employer over 52 weeks.

Specialisation

We understand that the Department has received feedback from young people that they would prefer to receive disability services with other young people. Any segmentation of the DES caseload (including cohorts such as youth or specific disabilities) should be carefully considered as this can create issues with scale, not having sufficient size groups and impacting financial viability. We expect a youth specialist would only be practically feasible in metropolitan areas where there is a population.

We do not support any other cohort specialists such as culturally and linguistically diverse or mature age as we are concerned about over-segmentation of the market and confusing participants with too many options.

Further, a specific program catered to youth and disability employment support service participants would further increase complexity and confusion for participants. DES providers have the expertise and skills to deliver services to young people with a disability and are best placed to provide this service. If a young person with a disability needs assistance with work preparation, they have options based on their NDIS eligibility:

- SLES if NDIS eligible and
- Transition to Work if not eligible for NDIS.

Changing Expectations

Within schools, there needs to be more education and support for young people to look at their strengths, interests and how that relates to employment. Worryingly, some parents and teachers have a low expectation of young people with a disability and as a provider, we educate the parents and teachers on what work a young person could do with training or further assistance. Career advisors within schools need increased disability confidence and understanding of people with disabilities and the services available. This would increase teacher and parent expectations of young people with disabilities and ensure that they understand that people with a disability should be able to work and participate in the community to the best of their ability. Within the delivery of SLES, we provide this type of advice, information on potential career journeys, and the steps to achieve this. Feedback from parents and participants about this service has been positive and it has changed their thoughts around options for the participant.

5. What support should employers receive to increase the retention of people with disability?

In 2015, MAX developed and implemented its unique Employer Business Centre (EBC) model servicing large employers and industries to cater for a gap in the market where large national employer needs were not being met. Our Employer Business Centres dedicates substantial resources to supporting employers to develop their understanding of disability in the workplace and increase the recruitment and retention of people with a disability in their business. The approach is delivered by a dedicated and substantial Employer team located centrally and regionally across Australia. The EBC supports employers to move from exploration, commitment to change, followed by training and support through to disability confidence, employer of choice and disability advocate.

Since 2018, MAX has made almost 25,000 placements through its EBC partners. We work closely with employers such as Collins Food Group (KFC, Taco Bell and others); Coles; Rabobank; Compass; Built and Northline Logistics. These relationships have taken a significant time and investment to show our referral, placement and support to employers.

We work closely with an employer to analyse their vacancies and determine if:

- the job can be carved into tasks appropriate for a particular person with a disability or,
- a job can be split into manageable tasks or shifts (where endurance may be a problem), or
- the job can be redesigned to adapt the process or environment to take into account the person with a disability.

This takes some time to navigate and understand the needs of all parties, sometimes utilising our in-house allied health professionals and the employer to ensure there is a good match between the work available. This can be very difficult to do with a small or medium employer who wants to move someone quickly into a role and is often why people with disability are less of a priority during the recruitment process.

Our relationships with these employers give us an insight into employer confidence around a range of topics. We are seeing more large employers' commitment to increased diversity and inclusion targets. Unfortunately, whilst those targets might include people with a disability, employers are prioritising Indigenous people and women above people with a disability. We suggest the Government consider more incentives for employers to employ people with a disability such as tax breaks or government procurement policy led change.

Employer Engagement and Confidence

Each employer's reason for why they are employing a person with a disability is different. For some, it can be the best person for the job or for others, it is a specific strategy to improve their proportion of people with disability as part of a diversity strategy. For larger employers, a specific strategy is easier with the support of a dedicated human resources team but it is often difficult to get direct managers on board due to the loss of productivity with induction and training of new employees. As a result of these costs, it is very difficult to get small and medium employers (SMEs) to commit to employing people with disability without further assistance. Small employers that employ people with disability usually do this due to their knowledge and commitment to this group, usually as a result of lived experience or as a disability ally. Our relationship with the Council of Small Business Organisations Australia (COSBOA)

has reinforced our experiences and aligns with the recommendations they made in their report “Making it Easier for Small Business to employ people with disability”.

MAX strongly supports a media campaign to increase employer and community awareness and commitment to employing people with a disability. As part of this, the research on the benefit of employing people with a disability should be updated to incorporate the individual benefits to employers, individuals, the community and the economy as a whole and dispel common myths around insurance costs, unfair dismissal etc. The media campaign needs to show a range of people with disabilities in a range of jobs and highlight their ability. Combined with this, the Australian Government should promote existing resources such as wage subsidies, Job Access, Supported Wage System and work experience/internship programs and make available additional services to employers such as tax incentives or training offsets.

In our experience, successful tools for employers include:

- Supported Wage System opportunities and wage subsidies
- National Work Experience Program
- Paid work trials
- Assisting the employer to adjust their recruitment to cater for specific disabilities such as sensory disorders
- Tailored recruitment pathways (or where MAX arranges an “alternate entry” for people with disability)
- Post Placement Support/Ongoing Support.

These rely on employers knowing that these tools exist to consider a person with disability and in most cases, as a provider, we educate employers about what they can access, would suit their workplace and recruitment strategy and assist them to access the services. Without a media campaign to increase awareness, employers, particularly small to medium enterprises, who make up a large proportion of employers across Australia miss out on accessing these tools.

SPOTLIGHT ON COMPASS GROUP

The Compass Group is the largest food and support services company in Australia and leaders in hospitality services across industries in every state and territory in metro, regional and remote areas. Compass have developed a range of specific initiatives to attract, recruit and retain disadvantaged job seekers, focusing on opportunities for Indigenous people, people with disability and women returning to the workforce.

MAX and Compass have established an exclusive national partnership focused on employment outcomes for disadvantaged candidates. MAX is proud to support Compass’ DES Partner Program, and the impact of meaningful employment for 50 candidates who identify as a person with disability.

Other projects MAX and Compass have worked on together include the S2 pilot project (2020) which was established to provide employment pathways for disadvantaged job seekers who were not able to engage in other programs due to COVID-19 restraints but able to apply for roles within Compass’ remote area business where employment opportunities had increased; and the 2015

FACS project 'High Growth Jobs Talented Candidates Project' (HGJTC) which enabled MAX to greater understand roles and requirements of Compass, retaining this knowledge for future recruitment opportunities to better prepare disadvantaged candidates for employment opportunities.

The HGJTC Project outcomes contributed to Compass' award recognition as Employer of the Year, National Disability Awards in 2017. During the past 2 years Compass have recruited 184 candidates from MAX. Despite COVID-19 impacts, over the past year, Compass' retention of candidates securing employment has remained above the national average in comparison to national Employment Outcome data.

Wage Subsidies

Wage subsidies are attractive to SMEs as the subsidy can offset the costs of the new employee with supervision and disruption to productivity, training and capacity building. This is less of a concern to larger employers. One improvement to wage subsidies that could be considered is ensuring consistency with the value of subsidies offered under jobactive/New Employment Services Model and removing any unintended consequences where an employer would favour one program over the other. The Government should consider the hours worked eligibility (before a subsidy can be paid) which can result in DES participants being ineligible for assistance. For example, with the Restart wage subsidy, there is a minimum average of 20 hours work each week before a subsidy can be paid. This excludes any DES participants with a work capacity of 8 or 15 hours and further disadvantages this group. We recommend that this is changed and expect this would increase the proportion of mature age people with disability employed using wage subsidies.

Job Access

As mentioned earlier in this paper, there needs to be an awareness campaign for services for employers to assist in the employment of people with a disability. Job Access is a great resource, but it is not well known or utilised. The process for a funding application takes a significant period of time (at least 14-21 days and up to 6-8 weeks for purchases that require allied health professional reports). This discourages use of the funds and in most cases, delays the start date of the employment. As a provider, whilst eligible to use Job Access, we use our service fees for some expenditure as we find that if we can provide the assistance to the employer and the participant in a timely manner, this allows for a quicker job start and reduces the risk of the job falling over before it commences.

Post Placement Support and Ongoing Support

Flexible post placement support is key to long term employment retention rates, ensuring that any concerns with the participant, the employer or the manager are quickly identified and managed. Whilst Outcomes are payable at the achievement of various milestones, there should be financial recognition of the work involved through a service fee.

For some people with disability, they need support in employment beyond 12 months. Ongoing Support is integral to providing support to people with disability if their role changes, if there are changes to processes or the impact of their disability varies. The range of High, Moderate and Flexible works well with participants and employers and should be retained. However, all levels of Ongoing Support should be available for all disability employment support services participants, rather than DES-DMS participants only having access to FOS and DES-ESS having access to all levels. Access to Ongoing

Support should be based on need. This may result in a slight take up of Ongoing Support in the short term, the long-term employment retention benefits outweigh the costs. This is further discussed in Section 7.

Existing providers have spent many years developing employer relationships, building trust and we are seeing the results of these relationships with increased opportunities for people with disability. These relationships should be harnessed to meet and expand the continuing needs of people with disability and for these employers to become champions of change for other employers.

BACK TO WORK AFTER INJURY

Ian Watt, 61, had worked as part of the burial crew team at Castlebrook Memorial Park in Sydney for 24 years and was 'part of the furniture' before one day, whilst walking down the road, an accident left him with a traumatic brain injury.

The injury left long term impacts that affected his balance, memory and confidence in interacting with groups of people. After 4 months, it was clear to his family that Ian was struggling with severe depression and they encouraged him to get help.

The Westmead Brain Injury Rehabilitation Services runs the Vocational Intervention Program (VIP) as a specific service to support patients with traumatic brain injuries back into employment. Before being referred into the program, Ian underwent a Neuropsychological Assessment and was medically cleared to commence the journey towards returning to work.

Basem Saad, an Exercise Physiologist with the health team at MAX, works with participants who have been referred to MAX through the Westmead VIP. Ian and Bas initially met together for a health interview to discuss Ian's current health and usual work tasks in order to determine what work might look like for Ian in the future. With the assistance of InvoCare, Ian's employer, they created a plan to help him return to work.

"We started by working out what tasks Ian could safely do" says Bas. "The two main barriers for Ian were limited balance and communicating with crowds," he says. "As Ian's work capacity increased, we were gradually able to incorporate additional duties and work hours into the plan. By identifying strategies to help Ian remain safe at work and return to becoming a productive member of the team, Ian's confidence improved."

Ian is grateful to his employer, to Bas and the VIP program for being able to help him return to a normal routine. "If it wasn't for the staff, management, workers, admin or the sales staff... just to have people to be around, to help my confidence, check on me, I don't think I would have been able to stay at the job. But to have people pull up to see how I'm going, you wouldn't believe how much better that makes me feel, to know people care," says Ian.

A video on Ian's journey can be viewed at <https://vimeo.com/560268661>

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

When a person with disability is referred to Disability Employment Services, their application to secure Disability Support Pension may have been declined and they do not want to find employment as they believe they do not have the ability. As a result, it is a challenge to assist them to understand their mutual obligation requirements. The perception of a DES provider is that we can assist them with getting DSP or through the DSP process, they often hear “disability provider” rather than disability employment services provider.

With almost 80% of the DES caseload on activity tested payments, there is a lot of work around educating participants of their mutual obligation requirements and how they can meet them. The interaction between participants and the dual roles of the provider in providing services as well as policing their mutual obligation impacts the trust relationship and can impact the participant feeling disempowered as providers have the power to affect their income support.

Improvements to Mutual Obligation

During the relaxation of mutual obligation and job search requirements due to COVID-19 last year, many of our relationships with participants improved without the threat of compliance action or loss of income support. The reduction in the number of times that Job Plans needed to be updated allowed providers and participants to focus on other things during appointments. It allowed providers and participants to focus on their employment pathway, giving more time to focus on the tools being used to find work rather than being distracted by policing of job search.

It also provided the ability to deliver a more flexible and agile disability service through a variety of delivery methods focused on the participant’s needs. Services were delivered with a mixture of face to face, phone and online services. Technology was utilised and for some participants, they were able to progress their learning and job search independently between provider appointments. To reduce the administrative burden on providers, we recommend that mandatory job plan updates are changed from three to six months, aligning it with the updates to Job Plans during Ongoing Support. This will allow providers to focus more on case management, strategy and service delivery and improve performance.

Further, compliance management could be moved from providers and reallocate it back to Services Australia, similar to how it was previously managed. This would improve the trust and relationships with providers resulting in better service delivery and employment. Providers could focus on assisting the person with disability to build individual capacity and source suitable employment and if there is any compliance required, they can recommend this to Services Australia who can consider this as an independent third party.

Job Search Requirements

Based on our knowledge of the individual, we tailor their case management plan and this informs the Job Plan and the activities in it. The numbers of job search are tailored to the individual, the local labour market and their circumstances. We know that it is more effective to work directly with an employer to negotiate the creation/re-design of a role to suit the participant. As a result, we believe the default 20 job searches is too many for a person with disability. A change in policy to a maximum of 10

job searches would be more appropriate, and in line with jobactive Stream C participants. In addition, the job searches frustrate employers with inappropriate applications when it would be better reverse marketing the participant to employers.

Another option would be to implement the Points Based Activation System (PBAS) for DES participants (for those with sufficient digital skills). This change aligns with the general DES program values of participant choice and control in the receipt of disability employment support services. It would allow participants to choose what activities will improve their employability, address their barriers and work with the provider to find and maintain long term employment.

To assist people with disability to meet their mutual obligations, providers should have the ability to put short exemptions in place that are less than two weeks in length. This could be limited to personal circumstances such as child care falling through or short term activities that satisfy mutual obligation requirements such as short courses or licensing. This would reduce the strain on Services Australia with participants requesting these exemptions and strengthen the relationship and trust between the provider and participant.

Voluntary Work and other types of engagement

Voluntary and community work are important strategies to improve skills and employability. These activities are similar to Work for the Dole or working in a Social Enterprise. The attractiveness of voluntary work is that it can cater for changing capacity and availability of people with disability, and it is not a compulsory activity with the risk of losing income support if participants are not able to attend. Due to the attractiveness of this activity, we recommend that participation should be time limited, with a maximum length of 1 year. This should not become a default activity for DES participants to avoid other suitable activities that can contribute to improving employability.

7. How can funding incentivise good work outcomes?

Work Readiness and Improvements in Employability

Work readiness is an area where payments could be changed to acknowledge where a provider has improved a participant's employability. Measuring improvements in employability can be a challenge because of their subjective nature. The Department may wish to consider the definition of an outcome be broadened to include volunteering, vocational education or training or undertaking drug, alcohol or mental health counselling.

In addition, social outcomes could be recognised including:

- improved self-confidence/self-esteem
- positive attitude to achieve goals
- increased ability to control anger
- effective coping strategies
- improved interpersonal skills
- able to set personal goals
- better able to make decisions
- improved personal care
- increased feelings of self-worth
- increased ability to cope in stressful situations
- improved family relationships.

Tools such as Workstar may also be able to measure progression in a similar way to how it is used in ParentsNext.

The time taken to address multiple barriers to achieve long term employment should not be a negative impact on performance as it is now with time to placement. The incentive to quickly place participants into employment leads to delayed commencements from some providers and inappropriate job matching as discussed earlier in this response.

The Financial Model

Overall, the current DES financial model has the right balance of upfront service fees and outcome payments whilst also balancing provider financial viability. The model allows providers to provide services and upfront investments in the individual. There are financial and performance management model incentives to ensure that long term employment, measured by the 52 week Outcome are achieved.

Service Fees

A proportion of DES service fees are used to fund individual assistance to participants for purchases such as training, uniforms, licensing and equipment. Whilst this might vary across providers, we believe the majority of providers invest some of their service fees on purchases for participants. Over a 12-month period, our data in the table below shows that MAX spends more per participant in DES than we do in jobactive.

Period 1/10/2020 – 30/9/2021

Contract	Total \$ amount spent	Average spend per customer
DES	\$10,461,660.08	\$523.08
JA	\$32,562,849.55	\$283.15

As a DES provider, MAX has a policy of providing financial assistance through its service fees as the purchases have a direct impact on gaining employment. The flexibility of providers being able to use part of their service fees for this assistance should continue. One benefit of this flexibility is that providers do not have the added administration costs of managing an Employment Fund, like jobactive providers have with their Employment Fund.

Changes in the labour market

Employer feedback that they are dissatisfied by the short term placements is inconsistent with our experience as hiring decisions about length of contract is within their hiring control. Some of our employer partners such as Apple, Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) and Built are moving to short 6-month contracts which allow them to manage peaks and troughs in their workload without adding to their long term payroll responsibilities. We are working with these employers to negotiate ongoing employment which contribute to Outcomes.

Short term contracts are becoming more prevalent in the labour market and they are difficult to manage as they are not eligible to contribute to an Outcome, with the definition of a Non Payable Outcome including non-ongoing employment. The disincentives for providers remain until changes are made to Outcome requirements to recognise the increased role of short term contracts, the emergence of the gig and portfolio economy and the casualisation of the workforce.

The overall focus of Employment Outcomes should be that people are working to the best of their ability (even if they are still receiving some income support) and Outcomes should measure that. Whilst the Department could consider changing Outcomes to be calculated off declared earnings and the Job Seeker Rate of Reduction which may work for some people with disability, this will not work for everyone. In particular, we are concerned that Outcome calculations based on earnings should not apply to SWS participants or those in an ADE.

Service quality and expertise in delivering services should be a minimum standard that providers need to adhere to, in addition to delivering outcomes for their caseload. Service quality should not be compromised to achieve employment outcomes. Service quality could be rewarded through the Performance Management model and we have a number of suggestions further outlined in Section 8.

Ongoing Support

As previously discussed in Section 5, Ongoing Support is a key tool to assist the participant and employer continue employment from the achievement of the 26 week Outcome through to the achievement of the 52 Week Outcome and beyond. All levels of Ongoing Support should be available to all DES participants, regardless of funding type or level. This enables all participants to receive the support they need to retain their employment.

The types of Ongoing Support (Flexible, Moderate and High) are appropriate to participant and employer needs and currently there is a gap with DMS participants only eligible for Flexible Ongoing Support (FOS). Due to the nature of DMS, we recognise the Department may be concerned about the

cost of Ongoing Support or overuse of this tool. We suggest there could be annual limits or the Department monitor any overuse and where there are concerns, the Department could request proof of the need and details of the support provided to a participant.

Documentary evidence required for MOS and HOS Ongoing Support contacts is administratively burdensome. We recommend that when a claim is submitted, the systems process and documentation could be similar to FOS. Any documentary evidence (such as purchases relevant to the MOS and HOS) should be for at that point in time. Any historical checking of evidence from the first day of servicing is excessive and is a risk of recoveries for providers.

The provision of Ongoing Support is a key tool to support employers in the long term with participants with disability as well as ensuring the success of good work outcomes. We believe it is an integral part of the DES service delivery model that should remain in any new disability employment support service. The recommendations above would make Ongoing Support more efficient and effective at achieving long term Employment Outcomes.

8. How can high quality service and supports be improved/increased?

Structure of the Market

All providers delivering DES should have a minimum governance standard to determine entry into the market. This should include a minimum governance standard such as adherence to the National Standards for Disability Services (NSDS), minimum IT standards, diversity and inclusion benchmarks as well as adherence to the national child safety principles.

The market should continue to be structured by business share allowing providers to nominate what share of each market they can service (based on their size and scale). This allows some providers who have larger offices to cater for a larger proportion of the market. This also allows smaller providers who may specialise in a certain disability to cater for a smaller segment of the market.

The market should be fully allocated to providers across each ESA but continue to allow participants to have choice of provider and control to change providers. We recommend a reduction in the number of participant-initiated changes in provider from 5 to 2 per year to reduce avoidance of services and non-compliance. This would not include any changes in provider due to relocation/change of address.

MAX supports the continuation of specialist providers and this is discussed further below in this Section.

Number of Providers

The number of providers in each ESA should be capped at a level that is consistent with the size and scale of the ESA. Our experience in the current Disability Employment Services model is that an uncapped model results in confusion for participants, employers and the market in general. MAX operates in two DES Employment Service Areas where there is a total of 24 providers delivering a combination of DMS or ESS. This is not sustainable across the market and we hope there will be rationalisation in the coming model.

We would expect the cap on providers would range somewhere between six and twelve licences, including specialist providers. Even in the largest of ESAs, the number of providers should be no more than 12, including specialists. The upper end of this scale would only be in large metropolitan regions which have population to support a market of this size. Any increase over this confuses participants and dilutes a provider's financial viability.

One advantage of capping the number of licences is that this will limit the impost on employers being approached by many licence holders regarding their vacancies, partnering and reverse marketing of their caseload. For some small employers, this is frustrating and gives them a negative impression of employment services more generally.

Innovation and Continuous Improvement

In the current DES program settings with the emphasis on performance and employment outcomes, it can be a risk for providers to test and trial innovations when it could affect their star ratings and therefore ongoing viability.

The Department could consider a projects-based fund similar to the Local Jobs Program – Local Recovery Fund. Unfortunately, DES participants are not eligible for these projects where there are guaranteed jobs. Program eligibility should be changed to allow access or a similar fund should be available for providers and other stakeholders to propose innovative projects for people with disability. Funding could come from the Information Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) Program where some projects have been approved to assist unemployed people with disability however DES providers aren't approached to refer to these projects.

Providers are able to trial new ways of providing services to participants including assessments, job search, training or case management within program settings. MAX trialed the Reshape Your Future project with mature age women to assist them back into the workforce experiencing disability or domestic abuse. We assisted them with a combination of assistance from our allied health professionals working on self-esteem and resilience, with a consultant on a range of job search topics and techniques and with a digital literacy trainer. Due to its success, the learnings from this project have been incorporated into our allied health service delivery.

Quality Service

Job seekers should be surveyed regularly to determine if they are receiving a quality service (based on the benchmarks of a quality service). This could be done using the existing participant surveys on a more regular basis using the technology available. Alternatively, providers could be required to conduct surveys of their caseload and publish the results as is currently the case in the Vocational Education industry. MAX regularly surveys its participants (including VET students) to assess their satisfaction with the service delivered and to find opportunities for improvement or best practice.

Providers should be rewarded for delivering a quality service. For example, adjustments could be made to the annual audit requirements where no non-conformances are found and audits could be changed to every two years.

Legal Model

The current licensing model has not delivered the anticipated flexibilities to the Department or providers. The proposed disability employment support service should be managed either through a contract or grant agreement. Our preference would be to have contracts for a five-year period with extension options. This is long enough for the market to operate effectively without any transition issues. It is a reasonable period of time to deliver services, evaluate long term performance, particularly 52 week Outcome periods and to achieve return on investment for expenditure on infrastructure and workforce capability. A contracting model provides certainty for providers and allows the Department to adjust the market and model through contract variations.

Workforce Capability

A minimum qualification for employment services staff has been discussed for some time within the industry. The employment services industry brings together people with varying degrees of experience, qualifications and education. At MAX, our staff's qualifications range from PhDs to Certificate level across human resources, business, psychology and other allied health services such as social work, and training and development. We have staff with more than 25 years of experience delivering employment services. The diversity of qualifications and experience brings a unique perspective when delivering services to people with a disability.

A consultant can't be an expert on every disability, and it would be close to impossible to have specialist providers for every disability. Disability confidence is the most important qualification in the delivery of services to people with disability. Over 33% of staff within MAX either have a disability or have lived experience with a family member with a disability. This includes the way to talk sensitively to someone about their ability (rather than disability), to provide empathy and compassion, to analyse the impact of the disability and ways to work around that in the workplace or during job search.

We employ staff from across a broad range of industries that provide a participant focused service. Disability confidence is a minimum standard which is taught to new entrants to ensure that all staff delivering DES have experience with people with disabilities. There is no single qualification that can provide the required level of recruitment and employment services experience coupled with knowledge and expertise of disability employment, disability confidence and the range of disabilities. MAX invests in staff training and capability to ensure they can deliver a quality disability employment service.

Specialist Providers

Each market (ESA) could have both general DES and specialist providers. This allows for participant choice as well as providing the Department with flexibility and diversity. All providers should be able to service all cohort groups and a disability specialisation is not required.

A provider that services all people with disabilities does not mean they do not offer a specialist service of the same standard and achieve outcomes for a diverse range of people with disabilities. Many DES providers, including MAX, offer generalist DES services as well as specialist services for specialist cohorts such as those with mental health issues and their generalist performance equals or exceeds their specialist performance.

We understand that the Department may be considering specialist providers focusing on specific cohorts such as youth. All providers should have the expertise and resources to deliver services to each cohort within an ESA, particularly those cohorts that may dominate an area. We understand the feedback received and an exception could be made for youth specialist DES providers. We do not support combinations of specialist providers such as those that might specialise in youth and those people with disabilities with autism or spectrum disorders. This over-segmentation impacts the number of providers in each market, is confusing for participants and creates very small markets that these specialists could service (and risks their financial viability). We recommend that any specialist provider is only allowed to nominate one type of specialisation.

We do not support any providers specialising in industries. An industry specialisation assumes that participants know the industries that they want to work in (and they may not know if this industry suits their abilities). Providers should have linkages with industries and employers that their participants have the skills, knowledge and interest in.

The current arrangements for participant choice of provider should continue. They should be offered their choice of provider in their ESA and then if they do not choose, a selection is made weighted by provider share (at the ESA level). Specialist providers should be part of this choice, allowing participant to nominate a specialist provider if they wish. If specialist providers receive all of a particular cohort, this would skew the caseload that is left to be serviced by general DES providers and reduce participant choice. The diversity of disability in caseloads allows providers to offer employers a range of participants with various skills, backgrounds and abilities.

9. How should success be measured?

Defining Success

The key measures of success vary with each stakeholder. As the Government provides this investment, their measure of success is most important. This can be measured in a number of ways including the:

- number and proportion of people with disability entering the labour market to look for work as this shows confidence in their skills and the labour market
- number of people with disability gaining employment with the assistance of DES providers
- number of employed people with disability in the economy.

We understand that a priority for the Department is to reduce the overall disability employment support services budget. However, sometimes a measure of success can also be a cost measure. This has occurred with the number of new registrations to DES which has greatly increased DES program expenditure. The positive impact on the economy through employment assists participants to fulfill their NDIS goals and contribute to society. The Government should be encouraging all people with disability to work to the best of their ability rather than relying on Disability Support Pension or other income support.

The number of people employed as a result of DES is an important measure of DES' success. Consideration should be made of the number of employment outcomes, the proportions of various cohorts, quality of servicing (a qualitative assessment) and progression towards employability/employment.

Effectiveness of the program

Program effectiveness is currently measured by the proportion of people employed, measured by Employment Outcomes as a result of their participation in DES. This should continue with some adjustments to the changes to the labour market as discussed earlier in Section 7.

Long term program effectiveness should be evaluated by examining if a participant returns to DES services over the long term (we suggest 5-10 years). This is not a provider performance measure as the participant may have received multiple services and can be impacted by many personal and labour market issues. However, the Government should have oversight of this when evaluating long term effectiveness of disability employment services. If a provider has successfully assisted a participant to be self-sufficient to find employment using the skills and techniques taught by the provider, this is proof of program effectiveness.

Measuring and reporting on performance of the new Program

Measuring the performance of the new disability employment support service is also achieved by measuring the success of providers and how their performance will be managed. The provider performance framework should focus on employment outcomes and progression toward employability for the most disadvantaged.

The framework should not focus on processes or administrative elements, including referrals to other programs. From a case management perspective, referrals to other programs could be a general KPI but at a level that recognises that not everyone needs this intervention, that the provider has the

relationship with the participant and is best placed to determine what interventions are most appropriate. Referrals should not be made just to satisfy a KPI.

Performance should be calculated using quantitative and qualitative measures. The qualitative measures may wish to include feedback from people with disability and employers. If employers are unhappy with a DES provider, they will withdraw their vacancies and find another provider or use a different recruitment strategy. Providers invest in employer relationships knowing how they contribute to the long-term success of the program to ensure there are opportunities for DES participants now and in the future. We suggest employer surveys could be done by providers with results to be shared with the Department and allowing any feedback to be incorporated into service delivery.

As discussed earlier, people with disability could be surveyed about their experience to provide insights about the quality service received from the provider. Complaints and information received through the National Customer Service Line could also be used as part of the qualitative assessment of the provider's service delivery.

Selecting the Best Provider

The Star Ratings has been used across all stakeholders to fairly measure a provider's DES performance, particularly their performance as a proportion of the total caseload being serviced. Whatever the performance measure and framework used to evaluate performance, this should be shared with all stakeholders including people with disability and employers to ensure equity.

Conclusion

MAX thanks the Department for the opportunity to provide comments on the disability employment support program consultation paper. This paper canvasses a wide range of issues and areas for improvement in a new disability employment support program.

Our recommendations to improve performance and address the Government's concern about the increasing budget impost of the DES program include:

1. Change mutual obligation requirements to allow people with disability the flexibility to accept a job suited to their skills and career
2. Merge DES-DMS and DES-ESS and their ten funding levels to one disability employment support program with three funding levels.
3. The referral and assessment process for people with disability needs to be clearer to users and articulate the purpose of assessments so a referral to DES is not a surprise and participants understand the purpose of the services they will receive.
4. The SLES program should continue as a work preparation program and that further promotion should occur so all stakeholders understand the program's purpose.
5. That youth with disability will receive DES when ready to look for work unless they are eligible for SLES or Transition to Work where a lack of year 12 completion is inhibiting their job search.
6. The achievement of training is recognised in the performance management framework and disability employment support service funding model
7. All DES participants are given 2 years of services and the 78 week review is abolished, reducing the number of ESAs and saving funds.
8. Greater awareness and increased accessibility to services for those that are already in work and would like to change jobs or careers. As part of this, providers are given access to the Employment Assistance Fund through JobAccess with a streamlined purchasing process.
9. A comprehensive media awareness campaign for employers and the community about the benefits of employing people with disability, dispelling common myths and the range of resources available to assist employers.
10. The number of providers in each ESA should be capped at a level consistent with the size and scale of the ESA. We suggest a cap of 6-12 licences including specialist providers.

We are happy to further discuss these and any other issues with the Department and to collaborate with the Department to create an innovative and effective disability employment program.

Like the Australian Government we are committed to improving opportunities for the unemployed and our staff work every day to give "every person, every chance".

Contact:

Deborah Homewood Managing Director deborah.homewood@maxsolutions.com.au 0419 922 123	Shane Tapley A/g Executive General Manager – Strategy shane.tapley@maxsolutions.com.au 0407 689 036
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