Disability Employment Support Program

# Consultation Paper Responses

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

* 1. **Who should be able to access a disability employment support program?**I think the current definition to include those with a disability, injury or health condition that will last more than 6 months is adequate
	2. **Should a future disability employment support program include employment pathways such as casual and part-time employment, community engagement, voluntary work and short-term unpaid work experience?**I would have assumed that casual and part-time employment were already a viable pathway for someone engaging with DES, and should be if not.
	Community engagement, voluntary work, and short-term unpaid work experience are all valuable pathways to employment that may well transition to paid employment. The social capital and networks built during these unpaid activities are invaluable in the development of a career and can allow those with disability to bypass or overcome some initial barriers to entry.
	It should be said that systems should be put in place to monitor ad ensure that people’s labour is not being abused in these unpaid forms of work, as can sometimes be the case.
	It would also be beneficial for a specialised transition program to be instituted for those wanting to progress from unpaid work into paid employment.
	3. **How can a future disability employment program better align with other programs such as the New Employment Services Model and the Community Development Program?**
	Having a digital and online aspects similar to the New Employment Services program would be valuable, as some people with disability may find this even more accessible than face-to-face services or at least be able to supplement their in-person services with this.
	On top of this, I think stronger links to training and skills development would be a good thing.
	4. **What is the role of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in supporting employment pathways, and how can this complement a future disability employment support program?**
	The NDIS employment supports should be significantly more intensive than those offered by the future disability support program, although it seems that some of these NDIS providers have copied their current DES programs for this and are underservicing NDIS participants.
	I believe that NDIS supports should focus much more on capacity building (communication at work, transport training, personal hygiene, socialisation, etc.) and support in the workplace during initial shifts.
	This could dovetail quite well with the new future disability employment support program, which could be working on the more mundane or repetitive tasks of searching and applying for work, utilising the significant professional connections of the providers to access opportunities not all NDIS providers could.
	NDIS providers will sometimes form an informal ‘Employment Team’ for their clients, which can include key family members, friends, carers, or other allied health professionals. I think someone working with the client through the new future disability employment program would be quite a powerful addition to an employment team.

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

* 1. **How can the assessment process be improved to connect people with disability to the right employment services?**
	I am not familiar with the assessment process so cannot comment specifically on how it could be improved
	2. **What should be considered during the assessment process when determining support required to help a person reach their work potential?**
	From my experience providing employment supports in the NDIS and the general population, this is an extremely nuanced topic with almost endless contributing factors that change significantly and constantly throughout service provision. As such, it should be stressed that the findings of these point-in-time assessments should only be used as a very general guide and am concerned that these could be used to ultimately determine someone’s fit for a job or effect their income supports.
	I would definitely suggest using a strength-based model foremost to determine a person strengths, abilities, and skills that stand out, as these will be the most useful factors when considering someone’s fit for a role.
	Noting down significant barriers and places/environments to be avoided and reduce stress would also be quite helpful.
	3. **How can the assessment process stream an individual with disability toward the right type of employment support, depending on need and goal?**
	As mentioned above, I think that the results of these assessments would vary wildly over time and due to a myriad of other external factors, so using them as the ultimate determinant of the process stream could be dangerous.
	At least in the NDIS space, the clients’ own personal goals and choices hold more sway than the results of an assessment like this. Although some clients may over-estimate or under-estimate their abilities, I think their own opinion is quite valuable and they will appreciate being involved in these decision-making processes.
	4. **Are there different assessments needed at different stages of an individual’s work journey, as they prepare for work, find and maintain employment, and progress their career?**
	As I have previously mentioned, I believe that the results of these types of assessments will vary greatly over time and can become redundant over just a short period.
	My suggestion would be to have a more detailed initial assessment which can adjusted regularly by those providing supports and then a more streamlined assessment that can be performed at regular intervals or major milestones in the employment journey.

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

* 1. **What has been your experience of receiving employment support from a DES or other employment services provider? What was good about the support? What improvements would you recommend?**
	NA
	2. **What type of services and support would best help a person with disability find and keep a suitable job, and progress their career? Who should provide this support?**
	As mentioned in the consultation paper, the services and support that would best help is individualised and supports should be tailored peoples individual needs. There should be a variety of supports available for different stages in the employment journey and individual capabilities, then give the client access to information where they can make their own choices as to what services and supports are provided by who.
	3. **What education and training opportunities help people with disability overcome the entry barriers to employment?**
	The TAFE Statement in Education and Employment Pathways is a qualification that some of my clients with disability have obtained, but as far as I can tell this has had little impact on barriers to employment.
	In general, TAFE courses in areas of individual interest seem to be a great way for people to overcome barriers to employment by gaining a recognised qualification and sometimes opening up networks through work experience or professional contacts through teachers.
	Although maybe not particularly useful for an individual looking to gain employment, the Centre for Disability Employment Research and Practice (CDERP) run an intensive course on Customised Employment that would be exceedingly useful for employment professionals to be trained in.
	4. **How can people receiving disability employment services also be supported to address other barriers to employment (e.g. health service or housing assistance)?**
	Employment professionals should be able to liaise with or refer to other government/advocacy organisations if they recognise that barriers beyond their control are contributing to someone’s barriers to employment. Working together with other professionals and organisations as part of a team of supports for an individual is invaluable.
	5. **What employment support do mature age people with disability need to successfully gain or retain employment, or transition into new employment or a new career?**
	In my experience, older clients often need some more capacity building training focusing on the use of technology in the workplace before beginning applications.
	It might also be an idea to prepare them for the changes that may have happened to the workplace in general since they were last employed, practicing new forms of communication and explaining expectations around diversity/inclusion.

## What employment services and supports would most help young people?

* 1. **What support do young people with disability need to successfully move out of education into suitable work?**
	As mentioned in the consultation paper, the transition from school to work is an important time for young people with disability, and indeed anyone. The supports offered at this stage of exceptional change in someone’s life should be very personalised and tailored to the individuals needs. Supports should especially focussing on things like career exploration, capacity/confidence building, and work experience opportunities so an individual can sample work before committing.
	2. **What best practices from existing DES or other employment programs help young people with disability find and maintain a job?**
	I personally work as an employment professional in the NDIS and there is a high importance placed on the transitions from school to work, as evidenced by the School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) that are typically funded for approximately $22,000/year for up to 2 years. The level of funding allocated to this in comparison to other NDIS employment supports demonstrates its importance and indicates how valuable economically it is for an individual to engage with work early during this critical period.
	I believe a similar approach should be taken by the New Disability Employment Service Model, giving special attention to school leavers and assisting them to engage with work early on to avoid more complication and higher levels of support later in life.
	3. **Should there be assistance to prepare young people to think about work much earlier than after they leave school?**
	The NDIS recommends that SLES be accessed in the final year of school and then a second year be funded after leaving if needed. This allows someone ample time to explore different pathways to work and develop potential career trajectories before they are overwhelmed by pressure from society (and often parents) to ‘get a job’ as soon as school would normally return the following year. Starting supports whilst someone is still at school also allows the support to dovetail more seamlessly into the education structures already present, creating a sense of familiarity and acting as ‘guard rails’ that remain constant whilst the regular school structure is stripped away at the end of the year. Stability like this during times of great upheaval or change can be invaluable.
	4. **How can disability employment services work better with the education system to enhance employment prospects for young people?**
	School information visits throughout the year, service providers developing relationships with careers counsellors, and providing supports or programs that take place in the school if possible.

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

* 1. **What are the most important things that can be done to build an employer’s confidence to employ a person with disability?**
	Education and exposure. Although I am uncertain on how this information could be disseminated so that the relevant people would see it (possibly an easily accessible website or online short-course).
	There are myriad benefits to employing someone with disability and many employers will only need to be informed of these to consider hiring someone with disability, whereas others will need to see it with their own eyes.
	By increasing the amount of people in the workforce with disability this issue is being addressed, but I think that some sort of training program or course available to recruiters and employers would be invaluable in reducing cognitive biases and stereotypes surrounding disability employment.
	2. **What services and supports does a disability employment support service need to offer employers to enable them to recruit people with disability, maintain their employment and promote career growth?**
	Firstly, support services should be providing employers with easily digestible information on the benefits of hiring someone with disability and answer commonly asked questions.
	I also believe it is essential that disability support services have someone liaising with the employer throughout the recruitment and the first few weeks/months on the job to address any issues that may occur during these stages.
	It could also be beneficial for employment support practitioners to be trained in observing workplaces so that they can identify organisational needs or shortfalls, then match these with the strengths, skills, and abilities of specific jobseekers that they are servicing.
	3. **What are examples of good practice of employer engagement and employer-led initiatives that have been shown to improve employment outcomes for people with disability? How could these be scaled in the disability employment program?**
	The company Specialisterne is a global organisation with a branch operating here in Australia. They work with employers to educate them and also form initiatives that recruit directly for Autistic job seekers, stressing the befits of this to the company and then assisting with the formation of an accessible recruitment and orientation process. This has been utilised by several government organisations already (ATO, NSW gov, Bureau of Statistics, etc.). Similar programs could certainly be developed for other forms of disability.
	A company called EvenBreak in the UK has been making great headway with disability employment there. They have recently developed a relationship with a recruitment firm called TPP in London, where they collaborate to provide information to both employers and job seekers about best practice. These come in the form of webinars, blog articles, and informative social media content, but they also offer consultation services for interested organisations.

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

1. I firmly believe that mutual obligation requirements are counterproductive to the job seeking process. I understand that these are enshrined in legislation, but I do not think this changes my previous statement.
As mentioned in the consultation paper, participants will apply for roles outside their skills and experience or find other ways to meet the obligations without achieving the end goal of employment. The simple fact of the matter is, that it is near impossible to force someone to work that does not wish to. Attempting to do so only furthers negative opinions of employment and causes animosity towards the organisations trying to coerce people into it.
I hold a similar opinion when considering drug use, where I believe that we could draw some useful analogies. Research has shown that punishing people for drug use or the sale of substances has overwhelming negative consequences for society and the individuals effected by drug use. When governments have de-criminalised restricted substances in the past and instead focussed more on rehabilitation for those seeking it, the issues surrounding drug use have decreased significantly. In applying this to the situation with mutual obligations, if there was less focus on punishing individuals for not meeting mutual obligations by suspending unemployment payments and more focus placed on addressing the underlying negative beliefs, perceptions, or motivations surrounding employment, then I would imagine the program would achieve much better results.
I know that this is far beyond the scope of the program and could be more likened to the concept of a universal basic income, but I believe it to be the best course of action.

## How can funding arrangements incentivise good work outcomes?

* 1. **How could the future funding arrangements ensure services across a continuum of work readiness, placement and retention are tailored to the needs of the participant?**I think the best approach would be to create a rating and feedback system that is more reflective of the actual quality of service delivered by a provider and allocate funding accordingly
	2. **What are the right pricing and funding arrangements, balancing provider viability with the cost of delivering high quality services to participants and employers?**Placing a much higher importance on client feedback and creating a rating system more reflective of service quality is the key
	3. **How could the future funding model be adapted to recognise changes in the labour market and types of employment available in the modern Australian economy?**Although longevity of employment with a single employer has been a more important metric in the past, modern patterns of work do not necessarily conform to this anymore.
	As mentioned above, I think placing more importance on quality of service and client feedback in the new funding system would be useful.
	4. **How can service quality and expertise be rewarded and balanced against quantity of outcomes?**By taking into account actual participant feedback with regular qualitative reviews of the information provided, possibly with follow-up interviews with a portion of the respondents.
	5. **How could funding arrangements for ongoing support be improved to ensure supports and services are tailored to the needs of the participant and the employer?**As each participant has varying ongoing support requirements, it would make sense to me that providers should be paid a service fee dependent upon the amount of hours spent working with a client on this. Unfortunately, I do not have any suggestions on how to disincentivise providers from overservicing clients or keeping them in this phase indefinitely so that they can keep accessing the funding.
	6. **What do good providers currently do to support people with disability into work?**If I’m being honest, I have not yet spoken to anyone who believes in a good DES provider.
	Coming from a position as an NDIS Employment Service provider, I find that many of my clients also have a poor view of other Employment service providers they have had experience with in this space as well.
	I would like to think that I provide a quality service myself, but I am sure that there are many people out there who would not think so. The main goal of my service is to support clients in my local market who are slipping through the gaps of other services. I do this by being flexible in the frequency, time, and location of service provision. I also personalise services to each individual, which is only possible due to the amount of funding provided through the NDIS. On top of this I take a holistic approach, remaining with the participant throughout the entirety of their employment journey from career exploration right through to support in the workplace.