



Response to the
New Disability Employment Support Model
Consultation Paper

WISE Employment | January 2022

Contents

About WISE Employment.....	3
Executive Comments.....	4
1. Who should be able to access a specialist disability employment program?.....	6
2. How can we simplify entry to the disability employment support model	9
3. What employment services and supports would most help people with disability?.....	11
4. What employment supports and services would most help young people?	16
5. What support do employers need to attract, employ and retain people with disability?.....	19
6. How do we best tailor mutual obligation requirements to increase the likelihood of people with disability finding work in the future?	22
8. How do we drive high quality services and supports?.....	26
9. How do we measure success?	29
Attachment 1.....	31

About WISE Employment

WISE Employment is an Australian not-for-profit employment services provider established in 1992 to assist people with disability and from disadvantage into employment. For almost 30 years, WISE has empowered job seekers to take control of their employment journey and find meaningful work.

WISE's vision is to inspire, transform and enable people to realise their potential, and strives to achieve diversity and inclusion across Australian workplaces every day.

WISE is a high-performing Disability Employment Services provider with 30 years' experience and currently provides services in 44 Employment Service Areas, metropolitan and regional, across New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria.

In addition, WISE delivers jobactive services in Sydney, Melbourne and Darwin and Time to Work Employment Services (TWES) to Indigenous individuals in Port Augusta Prison (SA) as well as Jobs Victoria Employment Supports (JVES) in metropolitan Melbourne. In addition to these, WISE innovative programs include GradWISE, assisting graduates with disability to find employment commensurate to their qualifications, WISE Ways to Work supporting people with mental illness in the workforce, and WISE Women and Rainbow WISE with specific focus on the needs of women and the LGBTIQ+ community, respectively.

WISE's award-winning Social Enterprises employ people with disability or from disadvantage who find it challenging to secure or maintain employment in the open labour market. Clean Force Property Services (since 2001) is based in Melbourne and Bendigo as well as western Sydney and Equity Labour Services (ELS) (since 1999) operates from Ulverstone Tasmania.

WISE provides NDIS supports from locations in Tasmania and Melbourne for supports including Assistance to access and maintain employment, Specialist employment support, Development of life-skills, Participate in community and Therapeutic supports, as well as the School Leaver Employment Supports. WISE Occupational Rehabilitation Services (ORS) is a Comcare-accredited provider.

In supporting Australians through all of its programs and initiatives, WISE uses the PROMISE framework as its decision-making compass. The WISE Impact Promise acknowledges everything we do is interconnected and WISE measures, records and report on how we conduct the business of empowering people through employment and the impacts that go beyond the 'job outcome' to take into account the individual (personal wellbeing), the relational (trust in others), the markets and institutions (funders) and the environment.

Executive Comments.

WISE Employment presents the following response to the “Consultation paper for Shaping the new disability employment support program” for consideration. Our response has been formulated in discussions with roles across the organisation and based on 30 years’ experience as a disability employment services organisation. We have given consideration to how the DES program can meet the needs of people with disability as well as other stakeholders such as employers, providers and government. While we have addressed the individual questions raised in the consultation paper, we emphasise the following points.

The development of the next Disability Employment Services Model needs to keep the elements of the existing program that have worked – enabling access to more people with disability to workforce participation – while being adaptive to future employment trends.

Specifically, the model should expand its base on consumer choice – of program participation, provider choice, and activities. Acknowledging DES as a specialist program for people with a disability, the program should be open to all individuals with a disability who require support to assist them in preparing for, finding, keeping and advancing their employment.

The existing “no market share” system for providers should be maintained given its impact in attracting more people with disability to want to enter the workforce and volunteer and register for DES supports. This could be further reinforced with consideration given to abolishing existing Employment Service Area boundaries or adapting to larger Employment Regions (as exists for other Australian government employment programs).

A future DES program needs to be flexible in recognising changes in the employment market and increased flexibility of work. For example, successful employment outcomes (for job seekers and providers) should include all types of employment activity (such as required by the GIG economy, self-employment and seasonal and temporary employment) as well as non-traditional flexible work arrangements.

Support for people with disabilities, and their employers, should not cease on the achievement of a fixed week outcome. Ongoing support should be expanded to adapt to the changing needs of participants once in employment and include aspects such as career progression, advancement into better jobs (e.g., in terms of job security and higher remuneration), and continuing improvements to overall wellbeing.

A focus for all participants should be an increase in the skills base for digital literacy. This would prepare people with disability for employment opportunities in demand in the digital economy as well as help them take advantage of the flexible ways supports can be delivered and increase access to assistive technology.

A general whole of person approach in supporting people with disability needs to be taken across all aspects of the program, reflecting that support and progress in domains such as personal wellbeing, housing, health, relationships contribute to building capacity for employment. This extends to encouraging community engagement activities (including through voluntary work or tailored mutual obligation options) as these activities have value in social inclusion, developing personal and communication skills and in developing resilience (necessary soft skills in developing employment readiness).

Partnerships across the sector are important to increase the quality of employment outcomes. This involves people with disability, their carers and representatives, employers, service providers and government. A future disability employment services model could emphasise the value of partnerships in achieving more successful outcomes for people with disability by encouraging and rewarding Providers to work with and develop innovative projects with stakeholders (e.g., disability peak organisations, employers) with a specific focus on cohort groups (e.g., people with mental illness, students transitioning to employment, mature aged). WISE demonstrates the success of this approach with its GradWISE program for graduates with disability and WISE Ways to Work program focusing on the needs of those with mental illness.

In evaluating the performance of a future DES program, WISE believes a broad range of factors should be taken into account beyond the number and duration of job placements. This could include the quality of jobs achieved (in terms of hours, pay), the participant and employer experience, measures on innovation and partnership, and quantitative measures on impact on the individual's overall well-being and impact on the economy. As an organisation, WISE measures its impact through the WISE Promise Framework and believes applying such a holistic framework drives quality, sustainability and positive outcomes.

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

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

It is the position of WISE Employment that access to a disability employment support (DES) program should be open to all people over 16 years of age who have a disability and who are interested in participating in any level or type of employment, regardless of their income (or parents' income) or Centrelink (Services Australia) payment status.

WISE strongly supports the principle of individual choice and believes that the decision to access disability employment support programs, the type and level of support provided and the decision on when to end that involvement is driven by the participant. Current exclusions based on participants' status related to their education, employment or disability unfairly limit individuals choice and their ability to access appropriate support to enter the labour market and achieve the best quality outcomes.

1.2. 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?

A future disability employment support program should recognise and support participants on their *employment journey* and across the broad range of biopsychosocial domains that impact each individual differently. The program needs to recognise and respond to individual differences, including disability and how that impacts upon workforce participation. Accordingly, this will vary, requiring flexibility in the program. For example, the impact of episodic mental health problems highlights the need for permissible breaks in employment due to conditions that can be recurring such as anxiety and depression.

The focus should not only be on getting a job (rewarding current speed to placement); future disability employment support should include employability and capability pathways. There needs to be the ability to work on education and career pathways and holistic activities tailored to the individual and their circumstances that build confidence, capacity and capability, which may not directly produce a specific outcome but will lead to later employment. For example, in the Northern Territory there would be potential to engage local Indigenous groups to help build capacity in their community such as Yarn group aboriginal elders hosting groups in conjunction with DES providers to help facilitate change and individual work preparation.

All work experience is valuable, including casual and part-time employment, community engagement, voluntary work and short-term unpaid work experience, in providing stepping stones along the pathway to employment (or improved employment) and building confidence, capacity and capability.

The following case study illustrates the success of different activities in building capacity which then led to successful employment. K (Tasmania), a young person with disability, low LLN and poor social skills, had a specific goal to one day become a truck driver. K had participated in a local NDIS/SLES program, building his confidence and social skills and was then supported to transition to WISE DES service to support his employment goals. His WISE consultant referred K to Esher House program for wellbeing coaching and focused on building his strengths and confidence. K was also referred to 26TEN for LLN assistance and a local Men's Shed to build his social skills. WISE then

supported K to complete Forklift training and driving lessons. At first, K obtained a part-time Driver Offsider job at Tasmanian Plant Transport, an important stepping stone to develop work experience and the skills he would need and which eventually enabled him to become a truck driver with the company.

Changes to the disability employment support program need to recognise changes in the nature of work, including the GIG economy, and recognise the hours that participants have worked across multiple jobs, allowing them to accumulate these hours towards employment outcomes. The program should require providers to work with and support a participant for as long as necessary to achieve the *best* outcome possible for them and their community, which may include supporting the participant through multiple jobs and training until they achieve the *best* job. This could be reinforced with a performance benefit for Service Providers for facilitating additional capacity building and to encourage quality support this could be factored into a revised Star Ratings framework.

1.3. How can a future disability employment program better align with other programs such as the New Employment Services Model and the Community Development Program?

Currently, there is no public evidence that Disability Employment Services (DES) would be better off under NESM or NDIS, or that DES is not best placed to provide disability employment support.

Any changes to DES need to recognise the reality that people move between programs and it is fundamental to their individual choice to be allowed to do that while developing structures that ensure they are not disadvantaged. A recent review of both internal and external feedback from DES program participants and other stakeholders highlights concerns related to participants having to retell their stories and the potential for re-traumatisation, and the difficulty understanding different rules (i.e. eligibility) for programs.

Participants would benefit from a greater integration of programs and collaboration between service providers. Currently, strict program rules and criteria create barriers to good service provision, leaving participants in limbo between programs, for example in the NT, CDP participants who come in and out of community are unable to access DES without a recommencement. While waiting for a reassessment of the eligibility, they spend time un-serviced and disengaged.

There is scope for better alignment and coordination between DES and employment assistance supports offered under the NDIS, including smoother transition between NDIS SLES participants and DES supports.

Employment programs should work together more seamlessly by utilising a common intake and assessment framework that enables participants to access a suite of programs, with ongoing reviews to reassess their changing needs and with providers' performance ratings tied to the achievement of activity outcomes.

An alignment of program boundaries – i.e., Employment Regions rather than Employment Service Areas could facilitate better coordination between different employment programs while improving access and reducing confusion for participants. Changes would give more choice to participants and reduce the potential practice of “dumping” difficult participants, as they would have the option to move to a different provider for specific services impacting the providers overall ratings.

1.4. 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?

Although there are instances of very good outcomes where NDIS/SLES and DES have worked collaboratively to support participants through transition from education into employment, there are currently significant barriers preventing this relationship from working to its full potential.

Currently, participants are required to provide evidence of their eligibility and be approved separately for both programs causing unnecessary difficulty and delays in access and servicing. It also often requires participants to retell their stories multiple times, increasing their anxiety and lowering their motivation to seek support. This would be alleviated if participants are only required to provide evidence once to be assessed and eligible for appropriate disability support programs including both NDIS/SLES and DES.

Guidelines around NDIS in dual servicing participants and what is permissible under “finding and keeping a job” funding is unclear and both NDIS and DES providers would benefit from additional clarity to ensure the programs can maximise the potential in their collaborative relationship. For example, assistance from the NDIS such as participant’s support workers able to accompany them to work or provide onsite support, would reinforce DES supports and help encourage more NDIS participants to enter the workforce, providing financial benefits to themselves as well as to the broader economy.

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

2.1 How can the assessment process be improved to connect people with disability to the right employment services?

For people with a disability, the ESAT starts off the process to get entry and access to DES services. We believe that the current process presents a hit and miss approach that discourages many people from accessing DES services and agree that an inconsistent quality of ESAT reports also impacts on people with disability receiving the correct services.

A sample of some of the difficulties we have found with the ESAT process are presented in Attachment #; in summary, they include:

- Time taken to organise an ESAT is too long and discourages people with disability from proceeding with DES applications – especially in the case of direct registrations who are eager and motivated to look for work – and accessing the services when they need them.
- Inaccuracy of ESAT's result in people with disability not getting access to the specialised services that DES can provide them.
- ESAT assessments being completed by "file review" or by phone are not presenting people with disability, or their carers/support services, to have sufficient input into obtaining an accurate assessment.

Suggestions to improve this process include:

- Broaden the providers/services that can provide ESAT assessments (e.g., GPs, non-government medical specialists) and allow participants to obtain independent assessments. This will help reduce the waiting time for an assessment and prevent backlogs as currently being experienced, as well as potentially improve the quality of assessments.
- All ESATs should be conducted face-to-face (preferably in person), with participants able to take along carers/supports – desk file assessments should only be used to reinforce this process. This will enable people with disability to best articulate their needs and provide the assessor with a clear idea of the person's abilities and goals.

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

WISE agrees that the current ESAT focus is provided from a deficit-based approach, emphasising more what a person cannot do as a result of their disability. This is a negative approach that can discourage and de-motivate people with disability from wanting to seek better quality and more sustainable jobs.

By shifting the emphasis of ESATs to focus on a person's abilities and what they can do lays a positive and motivated pathway to better employment options. As well, we believe a "whole of person" approach should be taken in the assessments, not only looking at the person's disabilities, but other life domains in which their disability might impact and present barriers – e.g., domains such as health, family, community connectedness, housing, transportation and overall wellbeing. This approach would help identify the strengths that could be used to support the person on their

employment journey as well as other needs or barriers that they will require assistance to overcome. This will also lead to directing them to the right level of support they require to obtain and maintain employment.

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

Following from the above points in 2.2, in applying a more holistic and positive emphasis at this stage of the process, it would also be beneficial to take into account a person's employment history, the perception of their own capabilities and employment goals. Introducing these elements at assessment stage would help maintain an employment-focus of DES services and assist providers to structure the supports participants need to develop the capacity to achieve their employment goals.

The participant's point of view on their own capability and the level of supports they require is also important. Where participants believe their capability is at a specific level (whether high or low), this choice should be accepted and reviewed (adjusted) after a period of time, if necessary. Accordingly, personal choice should be accepted where an individual believes a support system provided by a DES provider is a better option for their needs. For example, an individual with a disability may still require support if they have a work capacity of 30 hours and feel these supports are best delivered from a DES provider. These aspects should be taken into account as part of the ESA process when focusing on employment support needs.

2.4. 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 an individual with a disability commences their employment journey, the type of supports they require may change, as will their goals. This is not limited to the supports they need to stay and thrive in the jobs they have attained, but also to the supports they may require to build further capacity and achieve career goals, as well as from a whole of life point of view. A further review at this stage could provide an updated assessment of their strengths and capabilities, the impact of their work on their disability and whether they are better off in their employment – as well as provide information on the right supports they may require to maintain their jobs. An added emphasis in such an assessment, that could lead to better quality and more sustainable employment outcomes, would be on career progression – i.e., whether the employment has met their goals, what their ongoing goals are, and what supports might be needed to further build towards their career goals.

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

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

In 2020, to gain a better understanding of DES participant's experience, needs, wants, goals and aspirations across all stages of the employment lifecycle, WISE Employment commissioned a needs assessment research (through Nomat¹) using in-depth interviews (internal $N=9$; external $N=12$) with WISE and non-WISE DES participants.

WISE DES customers in the survey (50%) expressed an overall positive view of the support they received from their consultants. WISE staff were considered to be empathetic, supportive and professional, with examples provided of how WISE consultants had given timely support to them when they needed it the most and of efforts to understand their disability and needs.

"WISE is the best of them . . . I can talk to anyone down there." (Survey Participant #9)

Of the service features proposed by WISE, 72% agreed that gaining an understanding of their talents and skills was the most important, followed by finding available jobs that suit their skills, ambitions and experience.

Survey participants also recounted poor personal experiences with other DES providers or similar stories from friends and expressed their broader view of the DES program.

Issues identified regarding other DES Employment providers included:

General Issues:

Customers with disabilities (mental and physical) feel stigmatized and face challenges at all stages of their employment search journey. Low self-esteem and confidence and feeling misunderstood/neglected leads to mental health issues like stress, anxiety and depression that make it difficult to look for, find or keep a job.

Biopsychosocial circumstances that impact the scope of their job search and keeping a job are often ignored. Customers' chances of getting a job depend not only on their own willingness and motivation, but also upon their life situation including their physical and mental health state, where they live and the availability of transport, and family and support issues.

Specific customer challenges at different stages of the employment journey:

Looking for a job issues stated by participants included: Time they felt was "wasted" with unnecessary calls or visits to employment service site offices; Frequent changing of employment consultants leading to having to retell their story and further anxiety; Employment support not being tailored to specific disabilities; Poor job-matching and communication with prospective employers.

Customer grievances included: Not being told about agencies that help people with their specific disability type; Not being given access to courses or training to upskill; Being put forward for specific roles without individual permission; Being told to hide their disability on their resume; Not being

¹ Nomat, Needs assessment research, WISE Employment, October 2020.

heard; Providers focussed on their KPIs rather than the needs of customers, and; Providers not acting as good facilitators between job seekers and employers.

Applying for a job: Low self-esteem results in customers underrepresenting themselves in job applications; Mature age workers with disabilities find it even harder as they are usually not the preferred choice of employers.

Job interviews were an element of the job-seeking process that was raised by multiple participants as an area of difficulty. For many customers it is an anxiety-provoking experience. Some indicated that in job interviews it is “*tough to know what people want*”. Others were concerned that their performance in job interviews was poor.

Starting a job: Customers stated they would welcome the opportunity to practise or familiarise themselves with the assigned role before starting the job instead of receiving an impersonal introduction i.e. receiving a letter with an appointment date.

Keeping a job: Both mental and physical health issues carry a stigma and often lead to bullying in general and at work. This results in customers’ hiding their disability because they feel ashamed. Transparency with employers around participant capacity and capability to manage employer expectations and post-placement support is essential to ensure participants are able to stay in employment.

Suggested improvements that can be derived from the WISE Employment study with DES participants are summarised as follows:

Broader servicing:

- Providing a consistent point of contact for customers over time.
- Consider ways to make people feel like a person rather than a number (i.e., that make people feel like we understand their needs).
- Consider a digital record of consent for roles.
- Consider the needs of individuals in terms of levels of personal contact.

Employment providers should consider:

Customers believe that the core expertise of an employment service was their understanding of the job market and helping people to obtain a job. This included:

- Finding appropriate jobs for their situations.
- Knowledge of the market including which organisations have open roles suitable for someone with a disability or long-term unemployed.
- Process of getting a job (interviews, CVs, cover letters etc.).
- Identifying candidate strengths and assistance with presenting themselves best for a role.
- Help with strategies for realising their goal (e.g. undertake training first, then volunteer etc.)
- Ways to support people to remain motivated
- Investigate online tools for supporting customers to practice interviews. Answers could be reviewed by their consultant and feedback provided.

- Support beyond finding a job is also very important.

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

WISE Employment's three decades of experience clearly shows that individualised one-on-one, holistic and long-term support best helps a person find and keep a suitable job and progress their career.

Individually tailored service and support include assistance addressing a range of biopsychosocial barriers, resilience and capacity building, training and retraining, employment skills, career development, peer mentoring, workplace mentoring, financial support (fuel, uniforms, etc.), and most importantly, ongoing assistance to participants to help keep their job, including supporting them with new or re-emerging issues and assisting them to progress their career if they choose to do that. Support should be provided by Disability Employment Service providers, providing the lead in case coordination and working collaboratively with a range of others including industry, learning institutions and allied health providers.

Currently, there is little assistance or incentive for providers to support people beyond when they achieve an employment outcome. Further supports could be made available once people with disability have secured employment, including new skills acquisition, career progression or even assistance to finding a better job (e.g., with higher income). This support would help people with disability achieve more sustainable employment and assist closing the earnings gap between people with disability and others.

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

WISE Employment believes there is no "one size fits all" solution to this question as it depends on individual participants' barriers and aspirations; however, two example areas of opportunity that impact participants and employers are Digital Literacy and Industry Tasters.

Digital literacy and access to technology have a major impact on a participant's ability to participate in education and training, as well as their ability to engage in online job search or learn about different roles. There should be a national standard minimum benchmark for digital literacy and technological access, which participants should be provided with the training and tools to meet. This will equip them with the foundations to adapt to emerging jobs of the future as well as to benefit from the advantages of online service supports.

Participants should also have the ability to engage in Industry Tasters – linking with employers for short employment placements (2 weeks) – exposing participants to employment and employers to working with people with a disability. This would benefit participants, helping them gain a real understanding of the requirements of that role specifically and more generally how workplaces operate. Employers would gain exposure to people with a disability in the workplace and a chance to try a potential new worker with no obligation.

3.4. How can people receiving disability employment services also be supported to address other barriers to employment (e.g. health service or housing assistance)?

As discussed previously in this submission, people receiving disability employment services would achieve better, long-term and sustainable employment outcomes where their employment journey is approached holistically, starting with the ESAt.

Participants should ideally be able to access wraparound services via a one stop shop with allied services collocated, or services working collaboratively with a participant centred and led approach, with seamless referral and information sharing.

In areas with a general lack of service availability, such as regional and remote communities, DES providers in many locations are best placed to work with the participant providing the ongoing case coordination, linking with service providers, managing reporting and monitoring outcomes. The complexity and time spent on coordination would vary depending on a range of factors such as individual barriers, available services, with a regional loading – allaying any financial disincentive working in remote/underserved areas.

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

One of the 6 main drivers of growth in DES identified in the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) Mid-term Review of the Disability Employment Services Program, August 2020 is the increase in the qualifying age for Age Pension (4%)², meaning an increase in older participants who have become eligible for DES prior to pension qualification. Currently, over 53% of WISE DES caseload is participants over 45 years' old, that is, mature age people with disability who require tailored service delivery including the recognition of transferable skills and experience.

We are frequently working with participants who are mature aged and some have acquired a disability of some kind. They often feel that this disability is a be-all and end-all and there is no hope for them, they intend to sit on DES caseloads until they qualify for the aged pension. We have found that motivation and a retraining mindset is required in these circumstances. WISE DES Operations Manager NT

For mature workers there is a need to focus on less physical work, more on higher cognitive load, skills in microcredentials, short-term training and leveraging on existing work skills. Lifting the digital literacy skills base is especially important for mature age clients, essential for engagement in the employment journey, also everyday activities for example banking.

A Peer mentoring approach and long-term engagement is effective. For some mature aged participants, their access to technology, health care, transport and accommodation is further restricted by their low income, with some barely able to cover basic living costs, for example the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2020) Housing Data shows median rents in all capital cities now exceed the entire Jobseeker Payment. There needs to be more financial support available to assist participants to overcome these barriers to employment, possibly through better coordination with Career Transition Assistance.

² Between 2016 and 2020 the number of people on DES who are over 65 has increased by 3982%.

The following case study illustrates the type of assistance that is necessary and effective in helping mature aged participants through DES

S (Tasmania), 64 years' old, was unsure of future employment due to age and multiple physical barriers (Spinal Disorder, Lower Limb Deficiency/ Arthritis/ Chronic Pain/ Partial Hearing Loss), believing himself too old to retrain for new employment options. WISE Consultant worked with S, identifying transferable skills and job planning. S participated in 6-week Journey to Jobs Program, Community Services to Individual Support Disability Skillset (Mental Health) and Cert III Disability Skill Set with Foresite Training (Recognised Skills in Demand Vocational Training). Following a work placement with More Opportunities he secured full-time employment as a Disability Support Worker, aided by a Wage Subsidy.

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

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

WISE's experience in delivering DES as well as programs such as School Leaver Education Supports and its tertiary oriented GradWISE program, reflects the research supporting the importance of the transition from school to work and effective pathways from education to employment.

This transition could be better achieved if students with disability can obtain early access to DES services, prior to the completion of their education. For example, being able to work with students while they are still in education would allow DES providers to focus on their expectations, post-school employment goals, and specific supports required, as well as facilitate referrals to available programs. Further advantages of this are detailed in 4.3.

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

The following case study outlines the best practices applied in WISE's GradWISE program which focuses on students with disability about to graduate from universities. GradWISE takes a holistic approach to work with the students and involves university career units and schools, employers and industry.

Acknowledging the persistent gap in employment outcomes and labour force participation for Australian graduates with disability, WISE Employment set out to advance equality in graduate employment for people with disability through collaboration with Australian universities, industry and graduate career programs.

This led to the development of GradWISE, a new model of working in conjunction with university career/disability support services to empower tertiary students and graduates to aspire to, develop and thrive in meaningful and commensurate employment through developing job skills, creating links into appropriately supported roles with employers and breaking down barriers in graduate employment processes.

While developed in conjunction with Swinburne University in 2019, GradWISE has since expanded to eleven Australian universities, with GradWISE coaches embedded on the campuses of several universities (e.g., ANU).

GradWISE tailors a range of innovative supports to meet student's needs including:

- Career Coaches provide customised coaching to complement university supports in one-on-one, small group and online settings who work closely with participants to identify strengths and development areas to build a unique tailored profile and development roadmap to help participants find and land their dream graduate roles.
- Using Neurozone brain/body optimisation solution, assessing and strengthening 10 drivers of performance and resilience to improve employability. Participants who complete a Neurozone assessment receive a detailed Personal Report and assistance from their Career Coach to adjust behaviours. Many reported increased learning capacity and resilience and

found that adopting strategies into their daily lives helped them to thrive in their internships and graduate roles.

- A suite of tailored job preparation and job readiness activities:
 - GradWISE Masterclass: Monthly virtual masterclasses introducing participants to industry experts, graduate application processes and interview techniques.
 - GradWISE Live: An online community space to build social safety for participants to share their collective experiences and feel supported.
 - Peer support: Connecting students/graduates with former GradWISE members who have completed the program and been employed for 6-12 months.
 - Mentorships: Linking graduates with mentors in their desired field to help navigate the workplace e.g. Cisco *MentorMe* and Australian Network on Disability *PACE*.
 - Internships: Linking graduates to supported workplace environments to ensure they have the skill-set, confidence and knowledge to succeed in the work environment.
 - Shadow days: Introducing students to supportive employers to obtain diverse workplace experiences and build their CVs and knowledge of different industries.
- Once a successful employment match is made, Career Coaches work one-on-one with hiring and diversity/inclusion managers and participants to develop support plans and provides tailored post-placement support for as long as needed.

In 2021, the GradWISE Program was awarded the NES Award for Excellence 2021 – Innovation in Disability Employment, recognising the team's work in "bridging the transition from study to work for students with disability.

An independent Cost Benefit Analysis conducted by Pitcher Partners in 2021, concluded that GradWISE

- Achieved enhanced employment outcomes that brought significant social and economic benefits to the graduate, their family and the broader community
- Has the potential to improve the first-year earnings of graduates living with a disability by \$165m per year from a minimal spend of \$36 million,
- Will lead to increased levels of diversity in the workplace resulting in improved productivity
- Will see a greater number of graduates with a disability gain meaningful, higher skilled and higher paid employment in their chosen fields
- Help reduce HECS debt and ongoing welfare payments for most graduates with a disability.

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

As mentioned in 4.1, WISE supports an early intervention approach to engage with students with disability before they leave school.

Ideally, this would take place in their final year of formal schooling and could take the form of working with school career units to help identify the types of employment students may be interested in, the skill-sets required and what supports and actions may be required to help them in these pathways. An emphasis could be placed on student expectations while supporting them towards their chosen goals. Many students may be unsure of what employment pathways may suit them and this could be supported with more information, practical work experience, industry and job “tasters”, enabling the students to try things to work out what they are interested in and capable of. This would also extend to assisting students with disability to obtain part-time work whilst still studying. Crucially, early access to assistance would enable the correct identification of services/programs that would best support the students, regardless of whether they choose employment or further education, and support a more seamless transition while lessening the risk of youth disengagement.

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

As a long-term DES provider, WISE understands the importance of forging strong relationships with the school sector. As a provider, we have been willing to provide information to schools, work directly with students and their parents. However, this could be reinforced by a DES program that further encourages and incentivises early intervention, including such initiatives as embedding DES providers within schools. This could also be assisted by a top-down approach within the school sector to promote the availability of disability supports and connect to providers to work with the school in facilitating or supporting the transition process to employment or further available education.

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

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

The National Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (DDA) is 30 years old yet discrimination in the area of employment continues with 48% of working-age people with disability employed, compared to 80% of those without disability (People with Disability in Australia, 2020).

In the context of this inequity, it's important to build an employer's confidence to employ people with disability is to ensure they (employers) have a positive experience – one they will then be willing to repeat. Placing people with disability into appropriate roles for their skills and qualifications and providing ongoing support to both participant and employer to overcome any issues (especially in the initial 3 months) will ensure both participant and employer have a positive experience to build on.

WISE Employment through its GradWISE program attempts to address employment inequities that confront graduates with a disability, who have a 10.6% lower rate of securing full-time employment (in their first year after graduation) than their peers (2020 Graduate Outcomes Survey, QILT). A large part of GradWISE focus is on working with employers who lack confidence in hiring people with a disability, particularly when traditional recruitment and employment practices are geared to exclude them from consideration. It has achieved this through educating hiring and line managers through Diversity and Inclusion Training, early identification of programs to expose both employers and participants to each other, disability pathway programs, ensuring recruitment is fair and equitable and allows people with disability to demonstrate their skills and capabilities, and through employer engagement events such as Industry AccessABILITY Week, Industry/Alumni discussion panels, Job Shadow Day. The achievements of GradWISE are outlined further above in 4.2.

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

Employers continued lack of confidence around employing people with disability highlights an opportunity for service providers, employers and government to work together to put in place a framework that provides clarity and pathways to better employment outcomes for all stakeholders.

A consistent "Framework of Universal Principles for Employers" in place for employers involved with the DES program would have potential positive outcomes for employers, participants and service providers. It could include the following components:

1. **Promotion** – Promoting, recruiting and administering the program for employers undertaken by Government (separate from DES providers).
2. **Education & Training** – Designated providers who can deliver training to employers in relation to Disability Standards (within legal boundaries), minimum conditions, awards, industrial law, and disclosure.
3. **Case Management** – Close coordination with DES providers. Development of individual Engagement Strategy with the employer and participant.

4. **Taster Programs** – Internships and work experience opportunities that expose employers and participants to each other and allow people with disability to demonstrate their skills and capabilities with minimal risk to both.
5. **Appropriate resourcing** – Including incentives, wage subsidies, information, opportunities for further development/training. Inform employers of what resources are available and what we can do for them.
6. **Ongoing support** – Providing participants and employers long term support (52 weeks+ or for as long as participants require) with frequent onsite visits, including opportunities for ongoing career development/advancement
7. **Recognition of Excellence**
 - **Employers**– Participation in the program may be encouraged through opportunity to access enhanced employment incentives such as wage subsidies, additional staff training opportunities and recognition as an Employer of Choice.
 - **Participants** –Assists participants to make informed choices about their employment by clearly identifying employers who are committed to recruiting people with disability.
 - **Service Providers** – Reward providers for placing participants with an Enhanced/Trained employer within the Employer of Choice Program (this could be one of the outcome measures in the Star Ratings).

5.3. 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?

WISE's experience is that employers who are approached respectfully by knowledgeable and engaged staff with a genuine interest in working with them to place and support participants with disability are able to create lasting relationships that are rewarding to both employer and participants.

WISE Employment has demonstrated this with the Melbourne-based business of Hume Doors and Timber, an employer it has worked with since 2005. WISE's partnership with Hume commenced when the company's new Operations Manager identified difficulties in recruiting and retaining staff, particularly for production, pick packing and warehousing roles. WISE Employer Engagement consultant offered assistance through a trial recruitment which quickly developed into a strategy with a clear purpose, including tailored training and support. Through its partnership with WISE Employment, Hume Doors has become a disability-supportive employer, with the company now hiring 80-90% of staff for its South Dandenong office through WISE Employment's and its interstate branches also commencing to utilise WISE Employment's services. In employing job seekers with disabilities, WISE assists Hume to identify roles through which they can develop to work to their ability and to full-time capacity. In 2019, Hume Doors & Timber was successfully nominated by WISE as NESA Champion Employer of the Year.

The DES program represents an opportunity to help employers to overcome concerns and barriers they may have about employing workers with disability within an established, experienced and supportive framework – how this might be scaled up is covered in 5.2.

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

As previously discussed above (5.2), employers need a framework, consistent across the whole of DES, that sets out clear expectations, and which would support them in gaining the confidence to employ people with disability through:

- Disability Awareness Training (including Disability Standards, Awards).
- Clear understanding of financial and other supports available (Employment Fund, Wage Subsidies, JobAccess).
- Long-term support commitment (52 + weeks) from DES Providers.
- Consistent approach by all providers with a dedicated and knowledgeable Industry liaison working with employers
- Opportunities through taster programs (work experience / internships) to confidence in employing people with a disability.
- Potential to access additional rewards and recognition as an 'Employer of Choice'.

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

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

While meeting mutual obligations remain a core eligibility requirement for many job seekers, WISE Employment believes the choice of activities available to job seekers needs to be focused on increasing their employability, work capacity and work readiness. This can include a broad range of activities including work experience, voluntary work, education and skills training or participation in other programs/activities tailored to address individual barriers to employment. Activities can be tailored to participants' employment goals with outcomes being a discernible contribution to their pathway to employment.

Mutual obligation requirements for job seekers with disability also need to be flexible taking into account their work capability and benchmark hours as well as their individual circumstances (e.g., caring responsibilities, medical appointments).

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

A general whole of person approach should be taken in tailoring mutual obligation activities to participant requirements. Engagement in community (e.g., through voluntary work or other community participation) should be encouraged as these activities have value in social inclusion, developing personal and communication skills and in developing resilience (necessary soft skills in developing employment readiness).

7. How can funding arrangements incentivise good work outcomes?

7.1. 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?

It is the view of WISE Employment that participants should be able to participate in the program until they are satisfied with the outcomes they have achieved and choose to disengage. While participants are engaged they should have access to a range of holistic supports and activities that address broad biopsychosocial barriers, build capacity and resilience and assist them to achieve their career goals.

Funding should be initially based on individuals' level of engagement required (needs-based and tailored to needs and to where in the employment pathway they are) with further outcomes and performance credits available to providers on a sliding scale based on activity outcomes, rewarding capability and capacity building pathways. These activities should include participation in internships, work experience and mentorships that are aligned with study, interest and skills sets.

To move away from 'speed to placement', the performance framework needs to incentivise placement into higher/more rewarding jobs, more quality outcomes and match into skills shortage areas.

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

In WISE's opinion the current level of funding is appropriate and should be continued. The Boston Consulting Group Mid-term Review of the Disability Employment Services (DES) Program, August 2020 highlights two issues – participant outcomes (cost per 26-week participant outcome increased 43% since 2018) and increasing participant numbers (92% in 6 years between 2014 and 2020) combining to drive up the cost of individual outcomes and the project cost overall. However, by far the largest proportion of growth is attributed to COVID (31%), the impact of which is unlikely to be ongoing and so should not be included in the calculations.

The experience of WISE is there currently exists little evidence to suggest the NESM will outperform DES, with jobactive and DES outcomes currently comparable outcomes at 26 weeks. For example, for the period July 2018 to July 2021, WISE DES-DMS and DES-ESS services achieved a placement to 26-week outcome rate of 44.4% and 43.8%, respectively, higher than achieved for job seekers with disability receiving jobactive services with a placement to 26-week outcome rate of 30.2%. To increase outcome levels and drive down program costs outcome payments should be targeted and include broader incentives (financial and performance rewards) to drive quality.

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

WISE Employment believes that a future funding model should be positive and strengths-based, reflecting a focus on the ability of participants rather than deficits. It also needs to be flexible to take into account the changes in the labour market.

Within this context, 'Benchmark hours' is redundant, based on the concept of limitation rather than ability and fails to take into account the 'value' of different roles (8 hours per week working in a highly qualified/in-demand role may be significantly more rewarding, professionally and financially, than 20 hours per week in an unskilled /low paid role). In addition, the model needs scope to recognise participants' career development along the continuum of their employment journey, as they build skills and experience, and move to better jobs.

The model also needs to respond to the changing nature of work. Currently, of all employed, 19% of the workforce are in casual roles and 7.8% work as independent contractors (ABS, August 2021) and the Gig economy has grown nine-fold between 2015-2019, worth \$6.3 billion of GDP in 2019 (Actuaries Institute, December 2020). However, currently DES providers are unable to track commission-based employment such as food delivery (Uber eats, Menu Log, etc.) despite the hours that a participant may be working and the income that they are receiving. Self-employment is also hard to track, with invoices and profit and loss statements required, and some types of commission work are also unrecognised (e.g., working on fishing trawlers in the Northern Territory where workers are not paid until all the fish is sold).

To respond to the changing nature of work, and to better reflect the employment journey of individuals, there may need to be a change of focus from hours and duration of employment to 'value', with an assessment based on achieving individual activity outcomes and auto access to ATO for employment outcomes claims.

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

The current Star Ratings may have little limited relevance to participants or employers; however, performance system can be upgraded and utilised to drive higher quality outcomes and better jobs for participants with ongoing improvements across a range of holistic and employment measures reflected in higher Star Ratings (as discussed in 9.4).

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

The current DES contract (intentionally or unintentionally) places emphasis on 'speed to placement' with low expectations of quality job placements. A future disability employment service model needs to provide space and time to focus on getting participants a 'good' job. This includes for participants initially assessed at less than 8 hours capacity, who may want to build on that capacity, provided they have access to adequate, long-term support. Consequently, there should be recognition of the 'increased worth' related to individual capacity building and the value of different jobs. Currently, there is no value placed on the different levels of jobs or recognition of the difference between achieving an 8-hour as opposed to a 30-hour outcome. The process of achieving better quality outcomes and the increased worth and capacity of participants should be rewarded.

WISE Employment believes that participants should be funded for as long as they choose to remain in the program, with funding on a scale linked to individual activities and achievement of outcomes on the employment journey. This would encourage both investment in health and social outcomes and higher level of ongoing contact and provide continuity in service provision that is currently complicated and interrupted by the need to access OGS assessors to extend support.

For example, in the NT, WISE has experienced a recurring issue with OGS assessors' availability and determinations. We have had a number of OGS assessments extended for significant periods of time with no notice or valid reasons provided. As a provider we continue to support our participants during this time, even though we are unable to make any claims. We find that regardless of what supports we have been providing to a participant and what support level we feel they should be placed into, the OGS assessor will make their own determination, often based on a 5-10 minute phone call with the participant.

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

Good providers do whatever is possible within the guidelines – innovating, using digital technology, accessing high-level tools to give participants an advantage and help them achieve their goals.

At WISE Employment the focus is on the participant experience and ensuring they are provided with the best possible service and tools to support them on their employment journey. This includes:

- Accessible services – WISE sites are chosen for their accessibility and proximity to transport and other services. co-location of employment consultants in IPP programs
- Suitable staff – WISE workforce reflects the character and diversity of their community a balance of skills and experience essential to working in the sector. (see 8.5)
- Specialist Tools and Programs - Such as wellbeing assessments and coaching (Neurozone, Esher House), Rainbow WISE for people with disability in the LGBTQIA+ community, WISE Women (see 8.2), and GradWISE (4.2)
- Quality training – Targeted training delivered via WISE RTO (Interskills) and other training partners.
- Industry Specialist staff - Industry specialist consultants that work in collaboration with employers, businesses and Industry at local, state and national levels.

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

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

As noted in the discussion paper, the current DES contract has seen an increase in the number of people accessing the program. WISE Employment believe this is largely a benefit of abolishing market share, applying flexible employment boundaries and promoting customer choice. Importantly, while this has enabled more people with a disability to access the supports the program can offer them to get employment, it has also created a competitive marketplace where providers have had to adapt their services to attract participants, including through innovative servicing arrangements, and have been judged on the strength of their performance.

Since 2018, on average 35.8% of WISE's caseload at any point in time has been volunteers, , demonstrating the potential for providers to promote a service offering that has engaged more people with disability to enter the workforce.

The principles of no market share and flexible boundaries, should be maintained, with consideration for even further flexibility such as eliminating regional boundaries or alignment to the larger Employment Regions used in jobactive/NESM and other Australian government employment services. As per the existing contract, provider numbers should not be capped, thus encouraging a diverse range providers (on the condition they meet governance and quality provisions) with continuance based on performance. It's noted in the current contract, that although this provision was a feature, to date a mid-term performance review has not yet been conducted to assess existing providers or enable new providers to enter the market, so it is not possible to assess whether this mechanism is successful.

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

As noted in the question above, the principles of no market share, flexible boundaries and customer choice are settings that work well in the current program.

An example of the effect of these setting on our organisation, was to shift a focus on becoming a customer-centric organisation, placing the customer (people with a disability) at the centre of our decision-making. This has led to innovative, localised approaches to the way we support our customers and the way we deliver our supports. For example, an holistic approach taken to supporting customers with the use of tools such as wellbeing assessments and coaching (Neurozone, Esher House), launching specialist service Rainbow WISE for people with disability in the LGBTQIA+ community, co-location of employment consultants in IPP programs and developing roles of Industry Specialist consultants to work better with industry and businesses.

Further innovations could be sought by encouraging collaboration with other programs or local projects (for example, Local Jobs Program activities) or disability specific organisations.

Innovation from providers could be encouraged with further reductions in red tape (while appropriate regulatory oversight is maintained by the department) and a performance framework that incorporates innovation and continuous improvement (as qualitative and quantitative measures) rewarding providers.

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

WISE supports the notion of regular reviews (mid-term contract) as a system to recognise and support providers that are providing quality services and outcomes (to people with disabilities, employers and government) while enabling the removal of poor performing providers with new entrants. Such reviews should be based on a comprehensive transparent framework of performance, inclusive of quantitative and qualitative outcomes and impacts.

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

All model options given in the discussion paper (grant agreements, contracting and licencing) have their merits. The most appropriate model would be the one that best supports the principles of no market share, flexible (or no) employment region boundaries and customer choice and that offers the additional advantage of reducing red tape and streamlining the process by which prospective providers obtain a licence/contract to operate.

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

Whether the workforce has the right skills will be reflected in the quality of outcomes achieved by DES providers. It should be noted that knowledge of disability awareness is only one aspect required by DES workers – other aspects include knowledge of employment services and community services and experience in industry and working with employers. In considering setting minimum entry qualification, a full range of skills needs to be considered.

It should also be noted that setting minimum qualifications could have other consequences such as driving up wages in a workforce without any guarantee that would attract people with the right skills. Having noted this, ongoing coordinated training and development of staff on skills relevant to the services would reinforce workforce capacity

WISE believes that maintaining a diverse and engaged workforce is of equal importance as maintaining a skilled work force. Each year, WISE measures the diversity of its workforce in an annual Wellbeing, Diversity and Engagement surveys. For 2022, the diversity of WISE workforce largely exceeds or mirrors National characteristics, with 22.9% staff report mental illness and 31.4% disability, compared with National 18% (ABS Disability, Ageing and Carers 2018) and 20% (AIHW 2020) respectively, 3.7% Indigenous (3% National, ABS Census 2016), 27.1% Born Overseas (28% Nationally, ABS Census 2016) and 22.6% speak a language other than English (20.8% National, ABS 2016). This diversity is an advantage in understanding the needs and barriers of a diverse participant base.

Similarly, maintaining an engaged and committed workforce supports providing a good continuity of services to participants. For example, in terms of staff engagement, WISE organisational score in 2021 of 78% was 8 points higher than the Australian benchmark. This engagement is reflected in a turnover rates of 29% (FY20), lower than industry average of 32.3% (NESA Employment Services Workforce Survey 2020).

Engagement and diversity are important aspects of an efficient workforce that can be a measure in assessing the workforce capability and quality.

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

Disability Employment Services providers are, by their nature, specialist providers in meeting the needs of people with disabilities and assisting employers recruit and maintain workers with disability. WISE supports the idea of specialist providers, where it can be shown there is an additional and complementary need and so long as participants have the opportunity to choose their provider.

Specialist providers according to disability could be supported where on analysis outcome rates for participants with specific disability types are shown to be significantly lower than others. Otherwise, support for specific disability types could be improved through encouraging existing providers to develop projects with peaks/specialists representing these disability types. WISE has demonstrated this with its WISE Ways to Work program with people with mental illness and GradWISE program working specifically with graduates with disabilities (see case study in Section 4.2). These projects could be encouraged with additional project funding and recognition of outcomes/innovation within the performance framework. Alternatively, providers could be encouraged to work collaboratively with cohort specialists in programs within the New Employment Services Model as well as with Industry Employment Specialists. This collaboration and associated outcomes should be rewarded within the performance framework and the cross-program collaboration would also benefit participants and providers.

9. How do we measure success?

9.1. What will success look like for: a) people with disability b) the community c) employers d) service providers e) government

Success for all stakeholders would ultimately be a situation where disability employment services are no longer required because job seekers – with and without a disability – have equitable access to employment opportunities and ongoing career development. For individual stakeholder groups, success could be viewed as follows.

People with disability: Healthy, confident and connected with their community, making progress in their career journey in a job that they want and achieving parity in employment.

The community: Increased community connectedness and participation, vibrant, diverse communities with happy, active participants.

Employers: Diverse workplaces, with employers confident to employ people with disability.

Service providers: A financially viable and sustainable service model where providers can make sustainable changes in people's lives and progress on their employment journey.

Government: Collaboration between stakeholders – a focus on partnership to achieve the outcomes of an increased and inclusive workforce and ultimately on reduced dependence on Government support and increased economic contributions.

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

Currently, success is measured narrowly, focused on job placements while failing to recognise broader, holistic outcomes (such as improved health and social connectedness) which represent a significant investment by both service providers and participants, have cost/benefit implications and are necessary to sustainable, long-term employment outcomes. An effective program would move away from rewarding 'speed to placement' to rewarding placing participants in a "good" job with job satisfaction and career development and equitable pay.

To demonstrate effectiveness for participants, a range of different measures and data need to be collected along their employment journey at key touchpoints, looking at both quantitative and qualitative measures including increased capacity, resilience, knowledge, and satisfaction with both the provider and the program. In relation to employers, key data is around increased confidence and levels of employment of people with disability.

Key to measuring the overall effectiveness of the program is people with disability achieving equity in employment (which could be measured by pay equity, hours worked against capacity, and sense of job security).

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

Engaging people with disability, employers and providers as partners in the program which is tailored to the needs of individuals, responsive to change, encourages a range of participation/activity and rewards engagement and progress.

A possible collaborative approach could utilise something like the DSS Data Exchange Framework Partnership Approach that includes reporting on program-specific data items, and outcomes data using Standard Client Outcomes Reporting (SCORE) (<https://www.dss.gov.au/grants/programme-reporting/using-score-to-report-outcomes>). This would give the benefits of measuring progress rather than only end outcomes, is individualised, and provides the opportunity for ongoing input from participants and measures of satisfaction.

Regardless of which model is used, it should have the capacity to enable people with disability, employers and providers to have input on the performance of the new program and be a useful tool to assist with delivering quality services. Importantly, it should not be a time-resource burden, taking providers away from their primary role.

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

WISE recognises that a lack of transparent and accessible information about what services are available impacts participants' and employers' ability to make informed choices about accessing services, and service providers' ability to make the most appropriate referrals.

Currently, there is a range of Commonwealth and State Government Employment programs, as well as local and non-government community sector initiatives aimed at assisting people with their employment journey, all with differing eligibility criteria and requirements for participation.

To improve access for participants, the following could assist:

- Central Participant record – including a record of evidence used to access services and basic intake assessment.
- Information matching to locally available and eligible programs and services

The current Star Rating system has limited usefulness but could be upgraded to reflect outcomes across a wider range of domains (such as education, health, social connection, employment, client satisfaction), thereby making it more relevant and useful to participants and employers. Additionally, it could include measures recognising providers that have placed participants in jobs in demand and higher paid jobs as well as achieving social outcomes and innovation. Given the complexity and cost involved in setting this up and maintaining it, it is a function that would be best undertaken by Government and accessible online, potentially via MyGov.

Attachment 1

Section 2: Example experiences of the ESAT Process

Case 1: An NDIS dual serviced participant and YAL claimant, diagnosis of Autism/Anxiety. Referred to Stream A on 19/07/2021 and referred by Services Australia to an ESAT on 2/08/2021. ESAT was completed by file assessment and recommended a referral to DMS with 23-29 hour work capacity. File assessment missed significant barriers to employment requiring NDIS supports, which would likely have been correctly identified during a face to face/phone interview.

Case 2: NDIS participant (YAL claimant) registered Stream A 29/06/21 and referred to an ESAT for 16/08/21 as part of a DSP application. The assessment resulted in a referral to DES. Multiple visits were required to Services Australia involving NDIS support worker in order to have ESAT actioned

Case 3: ESS participant with PTSD (baseline 15-22, with intervention 23-29 hours) who undertook a COC ESAT was reassessed as DMS baseline 23-29 due to current employment of 20 hours per week despite this employment ending due to her being unable to sustain the required hours. Has likely been re-assessed based on current employment so the questions asked have failed to fully identify the level of support required.

Case 4: JS attended WISE Employment as a Direct Registration on 1/12/21 and advised of the need for an ESAT to be done soon so that he could be commenced - the job seeker was keen to get started. On 7/12, JS messaged WISE Consultant to advise that the medical form had been uploaded to Centrelink; Consultant advised she would request an ESAT booking and emailed the focus team to request. On 9/12 Consultant received an email from Services Australia advising this ESAT had been completed as a file assessment. On 10/12, Consultant checked JS profile to see if the ESAT had been finalised, however, it read as "in progress". Status had not changed by 14/12; Consultant emailed the focus team for an update, to be advised that *"Please allow 3 days for assessment to be completed, 5 business days for report to be submitted."*

Case 5: Job seeker timed out of DES due to receiving 24 months in Employment Assistance. However, has waited 10 weeks in jobactive Stream trying to get medical evidence and another ESAT assessment to return to DES services.

Case 6: A jobactive participant who has severe memory loss and often gets upset when he attends the office as he cannot remember where he parked his car, etc. It took 10 weeks and 3 days to enable him to access DES services.

Case 7: This job seeker completed a face-to-face assessment at Centrelink, yet despite presenting evidence of having a bone-on-bone frozen shoulder and a fixed hand that cannot be used, he was assessed as Stream B rather than given access to DES services.

Case 8: DSP recipient referred by a community organisation for Direct Registration. WISE assisted in completing the DR paperwork; medical evidence was gained the following week and ESAT booked; however, no available date until after 2 weeks. ESAT was conducted but came back as 0-7 capacity. We contacted local Services Australia to look into for us as the customer wanted to volunteer and look for work. This took 2 email requests and a further 2 weeks passed. By the time the ESAT was corrected, granting the client access to DES services), the client transferred to another provider because it was taking too long.

* Additional information can be made to the DSS regarding these examples.