

## **DES Reforms – Consultation on recommendations from recent reviews**

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Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on DSS thinking on high level concepts which incorporate principles arising from the Disability Royal Commission, the NDIS Review, the Select Committee on Workforce Australia and the Employment White Paper.

The specific issues identified in the webinar transcript revolve around two important principles:

1. that all people with disability should have the opportunity to work in open employment;
2. that all Disability Employment participants receive support that reflects their individual needs, circumstances and work aspirations.

Removing the minimum eight hour work capacity requirement, the two year limit on DES participation, and the requirement to be in receipt of an income support payment are consistent with the first principle.

The practical consequence of widening eligibility criteria would be a more diverse group of DES participants. This makes the second principle even more important. Consequently, reforms that enable providers to offer support that takes into account individual circumstances and work aspirations need to go beyond the two service stream option identified in the webinar transcript. Customised services must be offered to **all** DES participants.

The way to do this has been identified by the Disability Royal Commission and the Select Committee on Workforce Australia. That is, changing the current Job Plan from one that sets out a standard list of mutual obligation requirements to one that "maps a person's current pathway to employment and identifies a suitable mix of support services" (Select Committee 2023:266). The process of developing what the Select Committee on Workforce

Australia has called a Participation and Jobs Plan requires time. Time for participants and service providers to engage in conversations about participants' aspirations and circumstances and the ways in which the service provider could help the participant achieve their goals.

Recognising that building effective relationships between participants and providers requires time needs to move beyond rhetoric. Performance management and funding frameworks must enable providers to engage in time consuming, but ultimately more effective, service delivery practices.

A Participation and Job Plan as outlined by the Select Committee on Workforce Australia is also central to the question of mutual obligation requirements. The webinar transcript posed the question:

*If a participant is not engaging effectively under a general requirement to participate, would the option to move to specific requirements, for example, defined appointments, numbers of job searches or other specified activities, as is the case in the current job plans, be a reasonable response?*

I believe this is the wrong question. In my submission to the Select Committee on Workforce Australia, I argued that service users are happy to participate in program activities if they can see the value of participation (Nevile 2013:151-152; Nevile 2009:87; Nevile 2008:9; Nevile & Nevile 2003:138). The overwhelming majority of DES participants want to find and maintain employment. If a Job Plan has been developed based on a participant's needs, circumstances and aspirations, and which sets out a clear pathway to realising those aspirations, then repeated failure on the part of a participant to meet their obligations should raise questions about **why**. Does the Job Plan need to be revised? Has the participant's circumstances changed? Does the participant require more support, or a different mix of supports? Understanding the specific reasons why a participant is not fulfilling their obligations is more time consuming than simply labelling the participant as non-compliant and imposing a set of default obligations on them. However, as argued above, effective service delivery practices are more time consuming and allowance for this must be made in performance management and funding frameworks.

## References

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