

DES Reform Consultation Webinar Feedback Requested

Webinar Feedback Question & responses:

1. *DES reform consideration: eligibility extended to include individuals with a Disability who have less than 8hr benchmark.*

Supportive of this recommendation with view that all individuals with a Disability should be allowed to access employment support services. However, considerations needed as below:

- Comprehensive information pack/campaign to NDIS providers, support workers, individuals with less than 8hr benchmark to ensure information and confusion about what DES services are eligible and requirements during participation would be needed. Information clear to help individuals feel clear about any concerns they may have or misconceptions e.g. payments or NDIS packages being impacted if they participate in DES (if on voluntary basis). Funding to DES providers would need to be appropriate to ensure high level of support and mentoring can be provided to meet the participants employment goals and support needs. Questions need to be considered such as, can an individual in this cohort on and NDIS plan use any of their NDIS funding to support DES provider employment progress goals etc.
- Consider funding “bucket” for DES reform to allow providers to access funding to support individuals with disabilities to access training, self development/non vocational training, support worker mentoring external resources, on job OT, physio etc. Wage subsidies to cater to this cohort. Work trial funding or employer incentives to encourage employers to create positions suited e.g. consideration of other Disability government initiatives such as those overseas with quota for employers or benefit to employers with education being provided to support employers (such as Job Access, DES providers and Govt combined). Funding if possible to ensure appropriate services to support individuals with a disability to retain employment once in Post Placement phase.
- Appropriate service fees and DES funding model to allow providers to attract highly skilled, quality staff who can provide excellent service and support to this cohort
- Outcomes/progress in relation to the question of what would meaningful employment look like for this cohort could include: work trials, vocational related courses or tickets as lead into ongoing employment opportunities. Average hours achievement etc. Stepping stones to provide good foundation before ongoing employment entry to give best chance of success
- Review past success and failures of any similar initiatives to allow roll out to consider these if decided upon

2. *DES reform consideration: removal of 2 year limit on DES services. Removal of income support receipt requirement.*

- Longer period in DES services would be beneficial, with some review of medical conditions at a point in time to allow review of appropriate benchmark hours and funding level (should these remain). This would allow for continuity of service and progression.
- Removal of Income support requirement – as above believe it would be beneficial to allow all people with a Disability to have the option to engage in services should they wish to. However as stated above, comprehensive information for individuals with a Disability needs to be circulated and available for the individual, their families, DES providers, support workers, NDIS and other stakeholders to ensure the individual understands DES and is aware of the service
- Online Services participants if could be screened for Disabilities and have option and information at hand to be able to link to non online services as a priority would be beneficial to avoid these individuals being stuck and not receiving appropriate support towards employment

- A meaningful outcome for people with a disability may include addressing a non vocational barrier or seeking support for health factors, engaging in an activity to upskill or improve literacy or work related skill set, tickets, self development health programs, volunteering, social inclusion, community impact etc
 - Funding considerations as above may be necessary
3. *DES reform consideration: DMS and ESS services joined together, with funding levels catered to differences for individuals.*
- Could potentially be a good consideration. Of course, assessment at time of DES referral will need to be thorough to ensure people are being referred to the appropriate service in line with their needs. Clear distinction between WFA, DES and other possible service referral pathways and enough time for DHS/assessors to communicate and build rapport with individuals so they disclose information and feel comfortable that information disclosed will not affect any of their income support or funding through other supports at time of referral decisions.
 - This would be a big change, for participants, their families etc. Understanding of providers of how the Department and Government will select providers to deliver future services and clarity around what key areas the Department are reviewing in lead up to 2025 to determine who is a quality, high performing provider will be helpful to ensure all have best chance of ensuring service and internal adjustments align to possible future business outcomes and tender success.
 - Sufficient lead in time to allow providers to prepare, recruit, if necessary, train before launch of new DES service is a factor that needs to be considered. Otherwise, unintended consequences of rushed, low quality recruitment decisions, lack of planning time to establish appropriate premises, Department to release guidelines, deed and information to go out to vulnerable individuals (DES participants) who will experience change.
 - Unintended consequences with any change = the balance of a reformed DES service vs cost to taxpayers for changes that may have little positive impact e.g. DES logo changes or any expenses that could be minimized which may be considered to have little overall impact to future success of program. Any efficiencies in this area could potentially allow more DES allocated funding to go towards servicing and participant interventions, or employer interventions funding
 - Unintended consequence #2 – risk losing high quality staff in the employment services sector with any unnecessary changes. Need individuals to be able to see employment services as an attractive, long term employment option. Lots of concerns over job insecurity and instability arise otherwise, which sadly sees experienced staff with the skill set and cultural values/life experience who progress people with Disabilities forward to lead more meaningful lives, build confidence, contribute to their communities and achieve their goal of financial independence leave the industry never to return after going through extensive change and job losses.
 - Any administration reductions to the future service and efficiencies would be welcomed.
 - Any review or cross Department collaboration between Workforce Australia, DES and other Departments to review similarities and what has/hasn't worked, solutions collaboration to ensure nothing is overlooked would be beneficial (no doubt this is already in motion though). E.g. past pilots across contracts, quality framework across contracts success and changes/adaptations made after initial roll out.
 - Understanding the cost-of-service delivery for providers across different locations both metro, rural and remote is important in balancing any funding considerations to ensure participants and employers receive quality service

4. *DES Reform Consideration: Potential of a flexible service offering, in addition to a full servicing option*
 - Would be beneficial to allow individuals working 15hrs to be able to access DES services on voluntary basis if they are wanting support to get more hours and income. Particularly with cost of living/inflation pressures that many individuals are facing. Open up access to those wanting to increase hours above 15hrs.

5. *DES Reform Consideration: Greater flexibility and tailoring of mutual obligations with a focus on participating meaningfully in services.*
 - Choice and control and flexibility is important. However, need to consider the challenges of PBAS in Workforce Australia and the strengths of PBAS across Departments and providers to develop a good model with reduced administrative burdens.
 - Potential idea of “core” mandatory participation areas which all individuals need to undertake to support progression, confidence and skill building or step into employment, in addition to tailored flexible engagement options on top of those core areas which do not have mutual obligation attached. With option for those not engaging effectively to go into mandatory mutual obligation phase. Potentially if this could be auto system derived based on core participation this would reduce administrative burden.
 - Or a period of “intensive service engagement” could be considered with mutual obligation factor after an initial non-MO period for all DES participants (with suitable flexibility and tailoring to suit the participants health, location, skills to choose from suitable engagement offerings to be selected by participant)

6. *DES Reform Consideration: Work Assist changes to support flexible employment supports, less tied to outcomes.*
 - Believe this would be beneficial if funding was available to use at points in time and for barriers which may result in long term employment if funding interventions can be used more flexibly.
 - Any reference groups and continued consultation specifically around how to reduce administration burdens to allow providers to spend more time supporting participants and employers may generate ideas. Understanding that the need to ensure providers are using funding compliantly and delivering a service that will not bring the Department into disrepute is the balance required.