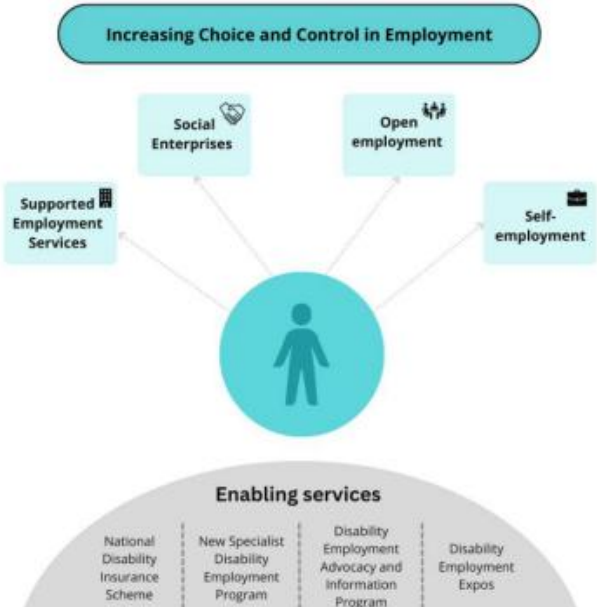


Topic: Response to discussion paper: **Next steps in Supported Employment:**
Discussion paper March 2025

To: Department of Social Services
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From: Kathy Barakis, Director and Advocate, LRC Communications
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Cathy Easte, President Australian Tertiary Network on Disability (ATEND)

Date: 24 June 2025

Discussion Paper item	Response from LRC Communications
Australian Government Direction (p5 - 6) Figure. 1. The model for increasing choice and control in employment 	There is a key stakeholder missing in Figure 1: The model for increasing choice and control in employment, under Enabling services. The model has identified many barriers to employment. Additional barriers not addressed by the model include: • Post-school, accessible Vocational Education and Training (VET) has not been delivered by TAFEs for some decades now, and • the sheer number and composition of disability employment service providers, each using their own “ways of working” and competition as a necessary economic driver. According to Cathy Easte, President Australian Tertiary Network on Disability (ATEND): “The vision for genuine employment pathways includes the need for accessible entry points into lower certificate courses and a supportive progression into higher-level Cert III and IV VET courses.” Accredited training provides: • certainty of skill attainment for employers. • a sense of achievement and career development for people with high support needs. Recognition of prior learning (RPL) in particular would allow people in ADEs and to look for similar work elsewhere.

Background

The National Roadmapⁱ estimates 450,000 Australians live with intellectual disability.ⁱⁱ NDIS supported 91,611 in 2023-2024. Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031 includes improved employment, personal and community supports, and education in its priority outcomes and notes "success rests on a whole-of-community response (inclusive of governments at all levels, business, the non-government and services sectors, and individuals).ⁱⁱⁱ

27% (24,735) of the 91,611 pwid on NDIS had a paid job in FY 2023-2024.^{iv} Of these, 36% aged 15-24 and 74% aged 25 and over are working in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs). "Some participants in ADEs reported that they outgrew roles and knew when they needed a change."^v

What are the barriers to employment

There are many barriers to employment, more so for people with intellectual disability (pwid). One barrier is that post-school accredited and accessible education has not been delivered in VET for some decades now.^{vi}

Another barrier is the sheer number and composition of mainstream and disability service providers, each using their own "ways of working" to support pwid in learning, community participation, and supported employment.

Other barriers are the readiness of employers to design inclusive workplaces, and biased community attitudes.

 education	VET training provides evidence of skill attainment and certainty for employers. Cert III/IV is required for open employment. To enrol you need to complete an assessment. To assess prior learning (RPL) you need to enrol. Neither of these are achievable for pwid. "The current landscape reveals a significant shortage of accessible pathways into Cert level courses at VET institutions nationwide. With the evolution of traditional Cert I and II level courses moving towards Vet in Schools or online platforms, a gap has emerged."^{vi} 37% of pwid aged 15 years and over on NDIS have a post-school education. In 2023 NCVER lists 20 courses for Cert I and 37 for Cert II. Foundation Skills was the most popular with 2,155 and 3,575 enrolments and 285 and 1135 completions respectively.	 collaboration	71,758 providers received an NDIS payment for 91,611 pwid in FY 2023-2024. 41% of these were organisations and 59% were sole traders.^{iv} 8,917 (3.6%) in DES in Sep 2024. 393/447 ILC projects in 2023 funded for economic and community participation, and individual capacity building.¹ "Frameworks which provide strategies for co-competition where organisations both compete and collaborate could prove useful in the health and social care sectors where competitive market mechanisms are being progressively introduced. This includes reviewing how service providers negotiate on information sharing and collaboration."² The DES 2025-2030 includes pro-rata payments for Outcome fees, Moderate ID payments and Ongoing support fees. This should encourage more collaboration by providers.	 employment	The vision for genuine employment pathways includes the need for accessible entry points into lower certificate courses and a supportive progression into higher-level Cert III and IV VET courses".^{iv} Accredited training provides certainty of skill attainment for employers. Accredited training also provides a sense of achievement and career development for pwid. RPL in particular would allow people in ADEs or in unpaid work) to look for similar work elsewhere. In 2018, 9 in 10 (89%) school students aged 5–18 with disability went to a mainstream school and 12% went to a special school.³ At age 15+ pwid in special schools are referred into ADEs to continue their education.
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1. [Projects funded by the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building program \(ILC\)](#)

2. [Competition and Collaboration Between Service Providers in the NDIS](#)

3. [People with disability in Australia: engagement in education](#)

ⁱ [National Roadmap for Improving the Health of people with Intellectual Disability](#)ⁱ

ⁱⁱ Inclusion Australia defines [intellectual disability](#) as "a term used when a person has certain limitations in cognitive functioning and skills, including conceptual, social and practical skills, such as language, social and self-care skills.

ⁱⁱⁱ [Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2031](#)

^{iv} <https://dataresearch.ndis.gov.au/reports-and-analyses/participant-dashboards/intellectual-disability>

^v [Connecting pathways into employment with the work integration social enterprise \(WISE\) - ability model](#)

^{vi} Cathy Easte, President Australian Tertiary Network on Disability



ATEND

Australian Tertiary Education Network on Disability

11th April 2024

Support for WorkAbility Pathways

ATEND champions the WorkAbility pathways proposal, advocating for enhanced access to educational and employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The current landscape reveals a significant shortage of accessible pathways into Certificate level courses at VET training institutions nationwide. With the evolution of traditional Cert 1 and 2 level courses moving towards Vet in Schools programs or online platforms, a gap has emerged. This shift inadvertently sidelines a segment of the disabled population who are seeking to either enter the workforce for the first time, retrain, or switch careers. The impending phase-out of Sheltered Workshops under the New Disability Employment Support Model underscores the urgency for alternative employment avenues. This transition not only necessitates reskilling but also presents an opportunity for individuals to explore and pursue their aspirations and vocational dreams.

However, the reality remains that the pathways to realizing these opportunities are severely limited. The vision for genuine employment pathways includes the need for accessible entry points into lower certificate courses and a supportive progression into higher-level Cert 3 and 4 VET courses. This approach is critical not just for employment but for enabling supported employment scenarios, addressing a pressing gap in the current national framework. The lack of suitable educational opportunities is particularly acute for individuals with communication challenges, such as profound deafness, limited English proficiency, intellectual disabilities, and severe dyslexia, who find themselves at a disadvantage with the prevailing shift towards online learning modalities.

The proposed WorkAbility model offers a blueprint for a cohesive, accountable, and supportive framework that spans both mainstream and specialized disability service providers. This model is designed to enhance the preparation, matching, and ongoing support of individuals with disabilities in their employment journey. Achieving this goal necessitates a collaborative effort with educational institutions to ensure that pathways are not only available but also tailored to meet the diverse needs of potential employees, thereby paving the way for their successful integration into the workforce with employers who are prepared and willing to support diverse abilities.

In advocating for this proposal, ATEND seeks to ensure that individuals with disabilities are afforded the opportunities they deserve to train, retrain, and secure meaningful employment. This encompasses not just access to appropriate training but also the creation of a more inclusive job market that recognizes and values the contributions of all its participants.

Regards

Cathy Easte

President