

[REDACTED] response to Next Steps in Supported Employment: Consultation on the way forward.

01 May 2025

Introduction

[REDACTED] committed to increase knowledge, skills, confidence and the power of people with a disability to make informed choices about their future life, including their future work and careers. As a long term effective and successful provider of Disability Employment Service (DES), NDIS school to work SLES, recreation, the arts and personal development in both rural South Australia and metropolitan Adelaide, we want to help and contribute to this consultation. Our activities have provided experience in understanding individual and family needs, working with businesses, labour hire firms, schools and employees including state and local governments.

This experience enables us to see the impact of Australian Disability Enterprises (ADEs) on individuals and communities. It has been motivational [REDACTED] to develop key solutions to build the knowledge and capacity of people with a disability, their families, local communities and schools.

[REDACTED]

Responses to Questions in the DSS Discussion Paper

1. Is there any other existing work that is missing from the table at Appendix 3?

- The Australian Public Service has shown leadership in setting targets in employing people with a disability (PWD). These targets are regularly measured to ensure they meet policy. However, many states and most local Governments around Australia have plenty of policies but there appears there are few action strategies to actually employ PWD. There is also a lack of measurement to meet any targets in policies. This is an enormous opportunity for Governments at all levels to help lead the way for positive change.
- What we have learnt from Spain and the European Community is that there needs to be separate targets and specialisation to support people with higher support needs into employment including people with an Intellectual Disability, cognitive or Acquired Brain Injury (ABI).
- There needs to be an independent system to assess productivity of all ADE employees, similar to the Supported Wage Assessment. This is long overdue.

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- A wide broad education program for PWD and their families is needed so that they understand the positive impact of open employment wages on their DSP. There is still so much misunderstanding on this point that needs to be responded to.
- ADEs and DES services need to be working closer together or in collaboration because our recent experiences is that many ADEs still don't know about dual funding. This is where a person in an ADE can also work in open employment at the same time for an extended period. The ADE and the DES should not be a related entity, which creates a conflict of interest.
- Schools and the Education system need to be responsible for every student with a disability having the opportunity to do an open employment placement while at school, with the support they need. For far too long this opportunity has often been denied resulting in the easy option of direct referral to ADEs.

2. What is your ideal future state for the supported employment sector and employment of people with disability with high support needs?

- Note that not all PWD employed in the supported employment sector necessarily have high support needs. Look into this first as many may be able to move to open employment and therefore more opportunities.
- Career development and employment supports need to happen much earlier in school so that students build information and plans for their future. This is currently happening too late and many students with a disability in schools are being overlooked.
- The model of ADEs or sheltered workshops has a long history of exclusion and of controlling PWD by providing limited choices for careers and employment. This model needs to be completely erased because of this history. The majority of people currently in ADEs in our opinion could be working in open employment given the right training and support. As our community increases its awareness of diversity inclusion, this is the right time for this to happen.
- For those people with the highest support needs, we need to open it up to new ideas and innovation and start from scratch because there are people with high support needs working and doing well but they are swimming against the tide. Such a process will encourage and bring out new solutions to this important challenge. Such solutions will include micro enterprises, self-employment, cooperatives, and true social enterprises where PWD get a real say and have power in the business.

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3. What additional actions do you consider are necessary to increase employment of people with high support needs in open/inclusive settings?

- We need to take serious note of the European community and for us the relationship we are building with Spain. We need to work not only with the public sector but the private business sector and set quotas. In Spain currently private businesses that employ 50 people or over must have 2% of their workforce with a disability. In the public or Government sector the quota is 10%, for which 2% of the 10% need to have an intellectual disability.
- In Australia we have seen some State Governments and local Governments introduce similar quotas within the tendering of business for work required. This includes construction, and other services. Victoria has been the recent leader in this area and once PWD are actually working with and around others, it quickly creates a more positive inclusive culture and encourages education and further employment opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds. There are many states that are not doing this, like South Australia, and it is an opportunity and a resource that's undervalued and under-utilised.
- A huge barrier to people in ADEs moving to open employment conditions no matter what, is being scared of and having a lack of knowledge on how to report their income to Centrelink. There has to be a simpler way because it is far too complex for people with high support needs to report, especially if they are used to ADEs doing it for them.

4. The Royal Commission recommended the development of a Plan or Roadmap to guide further reform in the supported employment sector. What would you like to see included in such a plan?

- Deinstitutionalising ADEs support networks to participants because they become reliant on all support from the one service which therefore creates a long term dependency. Changing this will support participants to develop networks of people without a disability.
- There needs to be an assurance and a mechanism in the Roadmap to ensure current ADEs have to connect with community based resources to support individual participants. This encourages more community connection, meeting more people with and without a disability and less reliance on an institutional one size fits all approach.
- Award wages paid.
- No demeaning work, e.g. sorting pigs' ears for dog food.

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- Using part NDIS funds for recreation, or applying for NDIS plans if not held. Some parents may worry about their son/daughter not being occupied enough with open employment.
- More resources spent on school to work transitioning and not just taking what may seem to be the easy option, i.e. placing students in ADEs.

5. How could the sector best increase wages for people with disability while avoiding job losses?

a. Are there examples that currently exist that can be leveraged?

- So many people in ADEs and some open employment jobs are doing such repetitious work with very little or no additional training. The other challenge is creating opportunities for people with high support needs in employment to actually learn and take on new tasks with support. A focus on training, challenges and learning new skills, will then help increase productivity and wage growth.
- For some people with very high support needs and possibly behavioural challenges, work may actually have a negative impact on their quality of life as they may not be ready for that yet. Most may be healthier and happier following their strengths and interests participating in recreation and the arts, that may lead to more self-employment and micro-enterprise work. Work for work's sake is not necessarily a reasonable solution.
- [REDACTED] provides observational experiences to people mostly with an intellectual disability to get an understanding of university career qualifications. This is valuable but mostly does not translate to a qualification or to increased personal career development or planning for those involved. This initiative needs to be expanded upon and this is being done in Spain. Meaningful university and post school qualifications designed to be practical and inclusive of people with a cognitive / intellectual disability.

b. Are there new approaches that could be tested?

- We need to focus on specialized skills training for certain employment tasks.
- A key area that we need to investigate is the impact of medication on people's concentration, energy levels, memory and productivity. Some key questions need to be answered. Are we able to prescribe medication to support a person's health that has less impact on drowsiness and productivity? Is this being considered for people with higher support needs when prescribed by medical professionals?

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- Another key area to be investigated is the impact on diet, food and physical fitness activities within workplaces. There is significant evidence that certain foods and obesity have an impact on energy levels and productivity. We should be looking at ways to develop fun and interactive gentle physical activity programs and healthy but still interesting food at workplaces.
- There needs to be a review on the impact of the growth of for-profit services in the NDIS and DES to see if the balance is right because it appears that there are far more for-profits than not-for-profits in the sector now.
- There needs to be a quota for disability owned and led services to increase their numbers within the NDIS and DES similar to what is being implemented for Aboriginal services.
- We need greater collaboration and partnerships between Aboriginal specialist services and disability services to improve the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal workers in the sector and to improve the quality of services to Aboriginal people with a disability and their families.
- For regional and remote Australia, there are examples from our experience [redacted] of exceptional community collaboration and employment developed through positive attitudes, relationships and natural networks. However there is the challenge of being isolated where there aren't enough specialists / therapists to support these natural networks. We need research to identify these innovated remote local solutions and we need to develop opportunities for access to these resources, [redacted].

6. Do you see a role for workplaces which provide specialised employment opportunities for people with disability in the future?

a. If so, what should these workplaces look like?

- Yes but they need to be located within already operating businesses and service providers, including Federal, State and local Government.
- There needs to be increased incentives for businesses in private enterprise to include training and internship programs for PWD with higher support needs. This would enable a person to do a number of intern programs and then be able to qualify to stay within any business they like that helps meet that business labour force needs. [redacted]
[redacted] What's missing here is a commitment [redacted] of a set quota or target of employing PWD, including people with an intellectual disability. [redacted]
[redacted] we would like to see [redacted] set within already existing [redacted] as well, operating side by side.

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7. How could the benefits of supported employment settings be reflected in open employment settings?

- Ensuring PWD are working in settings that understand and appreciate diversity and inclusion and that this is reflected in their values.
- That each employee has friends with and without a disability at work and that such friendships are encouraged through structured social activities like any other workplace.
- That the workplace is both physically and socially accessible.
- That it is an integrated work model, for example, each PWD has a buddy or peer mentor without a disability that they can go to and talk to.
- That PWD don't get left out of after work drinks or social activities.
- PWD are provided with the same opportunities, e.g. training.
- That there are opportunities for PWD to be supported to learn leadership and public speaking to become ambassadors.
- Encourage open days at the workplace so that family members can get a feel for where their son/ daughter/ brother/ sister/ partner is working.

Conclusion

We would like to see PWD reach their full potential and have more opportunities for successful, rewarding employment.

In developing our responses, we have thought about many of our aspiring participants we have supported in open employment who were originally destined to work in ADEs. 











