



Australian Federation of Disability Organisations

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13 February 2008

The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP  
Minister for Employment Participation  
Via Email: [MinisterEmploymentParticipation@deewr.gov.au](mailto:MinisterEmploymentParticipation@deewr.gov.au)

Dear Minister

**RE: REVIEW OF THE JOB NETWORK**

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the review of the Job Network.

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) is the peak national body representing organisations of people with disability. Our mission is to champion the rights of people with disability in Australia and help them participate fully in Australian life. The opportunity to participate in employment is a key priority for people with disability and is an issue which AFDO and its members have given significant attention to.

The attached submission outlines principles which should underpin reform of the employment assistance system and also provides specific recommendations.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact me on 03 9662 3324.

Yours sincerely

Jeremy Muir  
**Chief Executive Officer**



# Review of Employment Services

February 2008

## Introduction

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations (AFDO) has cooperatively developed a set of principles which should underlie the operation of the employment support services system. These are included in this submission, as are a number of recommendations to improve employment services for people with disability already in work and looking for work.

One issue requiring further consultation with the disability sector is how to improve support to people with disability who have been looking for work for more than 2 years.

## Specific Issues

### 1) Focussing on the Right Outcomes

The Minister has requested advice on how to ensure that “early interventions minimise the number of long-term welfare dependent Australians of working age”.

The rate of receipt of income support by people with disability is not an effective measure of the success of early intervention employment initiatives. A better indicator is the number of people with disability who have earnings from employment, irrespective of whether they also receive income support.

Several factors make it more likely that people with disability will continue to receive income support even after they are employed to their maximum capacity:

- Many people with disability can only work part-time due to the impact of their health condition, for example, they experience fatigue.
- People with disability tend to earn less and be employed in low wage positions.

- A person on the Disability Support Pension will continue to receive a part-pension payment as long as they earn less than \$1490.75 per fortnight.

As the current Standard Federal Minimum Wage for a full-time employee is \$1044.24 per fortnight, it can be expected that many people with disability who receive the Disability Support Pension will not earn enough income from wages to leave the payment entirely.

Early intervention policies should be aimed at supporting people with disability to participate in the labour market to their maximum capacity. The measure of the success of these policies should be the number of people with disability with income from earnings, including the number of Disability Support Pension recipients with income from earnings.

## **2) The role of the Job Placement, Employment and Training programme**

The 2007 Streamlining Review undertaken by the previous Government asked whether the JPET programme should be integrated with the Personal Support Programme (PSP). Both programmes focus on supporting people who face social barriers to their participation in the labour market. However, the skills and knowledge required by people working with young people transitioning from school to employment are specialised, particularly in relation to young people with disability. Not only must workers be skilled in communicating effectively with young people, they must maintain relationships and networks in the education sphere. This sphere is less familiar to people working in the PSP. It is essential that these specialist networks and knowledge are maintained for disadvantaged young people, particularly those with disability.

## **3) How to support parallel servicing**

AFDO understands that parallel servicing is currently permitted in the final six months that a person is in a programme such as PSP. However, there is not broad awareness of this option, and services wishing to pursue concurrent servicing before a client is in the final six months of a programme are prevented from doing so.

#### **4) The appropriate role of impairment specific specialist services**

AFDO strongly supports the retention and expansion of impairment specific specialist services across the range of impairment types. This supports individual choice and meets the needs of the many people with disability who feel more comfortable working with an employment service provider who has an in-depth understanding of their condition, its impact on employment and the best support to maintain their employment. It also strengthens employment outcomes as disability specialist services are highly skilled at addressing the specific concerns raised by employers in relation to hiring a person with a particular impairment type.

For example, a specialist employment service provider for people who are blind arranges an interview for a job seeker. The potential employer is concerned about how the person will be able to communicate with the rest of the office and how they will be able to move around the office safely. The specialist provider loans the client the adaptive equipment they need to do the job so that the client is able to demonstrate to the employer how they will be able to communicate effectively. The provider also arranges orientation and mobility training for the job seeker, so the job seeker is able to reassure the employer about safety.

AFDO supports the expansion of the specialist providers' role as advisors to generic service providers, working in tandem with these services to improve the skills and knowledge of their staff and to provide expert advice on the most appropriate supports for a job seeker. For example, advising on the most appropriate adaptive technology for a job seeker, or providing training for colleagues on working with a person who has an acquired brain injury.

An expanded role for specialist services, to incorporate both direct provision of employment assistance and work in partnership with generic service providers, will require funding to be sufficient to support both roles.

## **5) Improving job seeker access to education**

AFDO supports the recommendations proposed by the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) to improve access to further education and training, in its paper *The Role of Further Education and Training in Welfare to Work Policies* (ACOSS Paper 146, March 2007). The relevant section of the paper is copied below:

### *Remove payment anomalies*

Anomalies between income support payments that result in lower levels of income support for full time adult students than for pensioners or unemployed people should be removed. People with disabilities and single parents who receive pension payments are paid the same whether studying or looking for jobs. In addition, they receive a \$31 per week Pensioner Education Supplement (PES) to help with the cost of textbooks and other costs of training.

However, many of those affected by last year's Welfare to Work changes receive Newstart Allowance instead of pensions. If they study full time for over a year they are likely to have to transfer to Austudy Payment, in which case their overall level of income support is up to \$93 per week less than Newstart Allowance. They will not be paid the PES unless they already received it prior to transferring from a pension payment, and could lose the pensioner concession cards they receive on Newstart Allowance.

Over time, Austudy Payment should be merged with Newstart Allowance for unemployed adults (at the higher Newstart Allowance rate), as has already been done with the Youth Allowance for young unemployed people and students.

### *Extend child care fee relief*

Similarly, JET child care assistance, which typically reduces child care 'gap fees' for a low income parent with two children in before and after school care by at least \$25 per week, should no longer be withdrawn from income support recipients studying full time for 12 months or more.

### *More flexible activity requirements*

Participation in approved part time education or training should be accepted as substantially meeting the activity requirements for people with disabilities and parents, since these groups are often unable to undertake full time activity due to their disabilities and caring responsibilities. For example, they should not be compelled to abandon courses that have been approved by their employment service provider in favour of casual or short term job offers.

### *Combine training with employment assistance*

Job Network providers should be encouraged to invest more in suitable further education and training for disadvantaged job seekers than the current average of just three days' training at an average cost of \$2875. This should be achieved by increasing the overall level of funding to providers for this and other purposes through the Job Seeker Account for disadvantaged clients, and by extending the 'outcome fees' currently paid to providers when young unemployed people complete an educational course to include adults lacking Year 12 qualifications.

The Government should trial employment assistance programs that combine paid employment experience in a mainstream work setting with accredited training. The evidence suggests that these combinations usually work better for disadvantaged job seekers than classroom training.

### *Better access to Work Skills Vouchers*

In order to ensure that the Work Skills Vouchers are used effectively to improve people's career prospects and that jobless people have access to them:

- Half of the Work Skills Vouchers should be earmarked for use by jobless adults in the target group.
- Work Skills Vouchers should be strongly marketed, including through local community organisations, and career counselling should be available to people targeted for Work Skills Vouchers, to improve both their take up and effective use.

- Governments should also raise their investment in the Vocational Education and Training system to close the growing gap between demand for courses and the resources available to colleges.

Australian and international evidence shows that policies to assist jobless people into employment are more likely to be effective if they invest in the education and skills of disadvantaged job seekers.

The changes proposed by ACOSS would help achieve this.

## **6) The value of introducing a Job Seeker Account to the Disability Employment Network**

The introduction of a Job Seeker Account into the Disability Employment Network has been mooted. AFDO considers it should only be introduced if accompanied by additional funding. That is, funds to make up the Account should not be taken from within existing funding to the Disability Employment Network. Moreover, a Job Seeker Account, if introduced, should not be used to fund day-to-day running costs of organisations, including disability accommodation related costs.

# **Principles and recommendations to guide the delivery of employment support programs and services to job seekers and employees with disability and their employers**

## **Overview**

For many people with disability access to employment support programs and services is vital to maintain employment or to ensure a successful and seamless transition into the workplace. In recognition that each job-seeker is different, programs and services may be necessary at some, or all, stages of the employment continuum: transitioning from education to work; getting ready for work; looking for work; entry into work; post placement support; and career development. Many people with disability also require access to other programs and services to ensure successful participation in the workplace.

Given the variety of issues that arise for jobseekers and employees with disability, employment support programs and services are delivered by a variety of service providers in the lead up to and after employment is gained.

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations believes that the current model which guides the delivery of employment support programs and services is failing to meet the needs of people with disability, including Indigenous people with disability. This is evidenced by the fact that employment rates of people with disability have not increased and complaints about discrimination in employment are still high.<sup>1</sup>

The Australian Federation of Disability Organisations believes that the current model which guides the delivery of employment support programs and services urgently needs to be comprehensively reviewed, using a process that provides sufficient time and resources to effectively engage people with disability.

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<sup>1</sup> See HREOC (2005) Issues paper 1. Employment and Disability – the Statistics. Available at [www.humanrights.gov.au/disability\\_rights/employment\\_inquiry/papers/issues1.htm](http://www.humanrights.gov.au/disability_rights/employment_inquiry/papers/issues1.htm); Vision Australia (2007). Results and observations from research into employment levels in Australia. Overview. Page 3. Available at [www.visionaustralia.org.au/docs/news\\_events/Employment\\_Overview.doc](http://www.visionaustralia.org.au/docs/news_events/Employment_Overview.doc)

This document outlines the overarching principles which should guide this review in the following areas:

1. Assessment for service
2. Responsive service delivery
3. Connectedness between services: a whole-of-government approach
4. Program design, evaluation and research.

We believe that the systemic application of these principles will enhance the assistance available to people with disability from employment service providers and lead to more efficient use of government resources. However, this is only one component of a responsive and effective employment support system.

We believe broader systemic change is urgently needed to address the myriad barriers that currently prevent people with disability from entering and remaining in employment. The development and implementation of a National Disability Employment Strategy, as proposed by the Government, is such a solution. A National Disability Employment Strategy should encompass the principles outlined in this document.

## 1. Assessment for service

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- 1.1 An assessment for service should be focused on identifying individual needs and should not be linked to other purposes.
- 1.2 Assessment tools should be individually focused and not comparative.
- 1.3 The assessment tool to determine support needs should be evidence-based and produce reliable, consistent and valid results.
- 1.4 The assessment should ensure that all barriers (vocational and non vocational) associated with participation in employment are identified.
- 1.5 The assessment should ensure that individuals are referred to appropriate services to address all identified needs, vocational and non-vocational, in order to achieve sustained participation in the workforce.
- 1.6 The assessment should be conducted in a manner which establishes a positive relationship between the assessor and the person being assessed.
- 1.7 Assessments should acknowledge that people with disability have specific insight into their own conditions and experience and should give this due regard and weight.
- 1.8 Assessment guidelines should encourage assessors to seek expert/specialist advice when required.
- 1.9 People with disability should have the right to determine the extent to which the medical and impairment related information they disclose during the assessment process is shared with other agencies.

- 1.10 Where information is shared between agencies, mechanisms should be provided to ensure information about jobseekers is transferred efficiently, effectively and in accordance with privacy laws.
- 1.11 The number of re-assessment processes should be minimised.
- 1.12 People with a disability should not have the supports recommended in their assessment compromised by the lack of availability of services.
- 1.13 No-one should be deemed 'unemployable' at the end of an assessment for service.
- 1.14 Where a recommended referral cannot be followed through because a service is not available, this should be recorded and used to inform service design.
- 1.15 Service providers and jobseekers should be able to challenge and appeal all assessment for service decisions within a reasonable time frame.
- 1.16 Service providers should have effective internal complaints resolution procedures in place and people with disability should be able to complain to an independent body where internal procedures have been ineffective or are not appropriate.

RECOMMENDATION 1: Assessment for service and assessment for income support processes should be uncoupled and operate independently to guarantee that the purpose of assessment is clear. This will assist to ensure that the assessment process produces reliable, valid and consistent results.

RECOMMENDATION 2: Rules which link volunteering to look for work to a review of eligibility for the Disability Support Pension (DSP) should be overruled. This is currently having the unintended effect of acting as a disincentive to looking for work for people in receipt of the DSP.

RECOMMENDATION 3: The Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) should be replaced with a single tool that measures absolute disadvantage and is individually focused.

RECOMMENDATION 4: The Job Capacity Assessment process should be redesigned to conform to the principles outlined above.

RECOMMENDATION 5: An effective tool to assess the functional impact of impairment on participation and the need for support should be developed that is consistent with the International Classification of Functioning and Impairment.

RECOMMENDATION 6: All support programs should have an identified assessment phase.

RECOMMENDATION 7: All service providers should have effective internal complaints resolution procedures in place and an independent complaints body should be charged/established where internal procedures have been ineffective or are not appropriate.

## 2. Responsive service delivery

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- 2.1 A range of services should be available to respond to the range of individual needs.
- 2.2 People with disabilities should have access to services appropriate to their particular needs on an as-needed basis.
- 2.3 People with disability should have access to quality services irrespective of where they live, their disability type or the degree of their impairment.
- 2.4 Waiting lists should only be used in limited situations and be of short duration with identified maximum limits.
- 2.5 There should be capacity within programs to easily transfer people according to the changing circumstances of the individual.
- 2.6 Services should have sufficient resources and capacity to be flexible to ensure the delivery of programs to meet the needs of their clients.
- 2.7 Parameters for the service model should enable service providers to deliver flexible and tailored services to meet the individuals' needs.
- 2.8 The range of available services should be promoted to service providers and people with disability to ensure appropriate referrals and choice for people with disability.
- 2.9 Services should put in place effective mechanisms to ensure that service plans are developed in partnership with people with disability; government regulations should also support this outcome.

RECOMMENDATION 8: All programs should be uncapped to ensure services are available on demand.

RECOMMENDATION 9: In order to ensure access to services on an as-needed basis in accordance with assessments, restrictions on the amount and type of support available to each individual should be lifted.

RECOMMENDATION 10: To encourage services to transfer people with disability to new services when their circumstances warrant, this should be made easy, should not reflect detrimentally on the original service and there should be a mechanism to record the contribution of that service to the point of transfer.

RECOMMENDATION 11: The range of employment support services and programs available to people with a disability must be at least maintained and should be funded to meet need. In particular, the range of specialist services should be maintained and adequately funded to assist their clients and to provide support and training to generic services.

RECOMMENDATION 12: All job seekers, whether in metropolitan or non-metropolitan areas, should have equity of access to quality services.

RECOMMENDATION 13: Service plans should be developed in partnership with jobseekers with disability.

RECOMMENDATION 14: The operating framework for service providers needs to be revised in order to improve capacity and ensure the delivery of streamlined and responsive services.

### 3. Connectedness between services: a whole-of-government approach

#### KEY PRINCIPLES

- 3.1 Government should engage in high level, strategic planning, using cross departmental collaboration and strategic cooperation to ensure effective connections are established and maintained across employment support programs and health, education and training, housing and other relevant service areas.
- 3.2 Frameworks and structures should maximise the utilisation of available expertise encouraging interagency referral, collaboration and parallel servicing to meet client needs and achieve employment.
- 3.3 The framework for the delivery of employment support services should link individuals with assistance to meet the costs associated with preparing for and participating in employment.

RECOMMENDATION 15: All providers of Australian Government employment services (DEN, JN, VRS, PSP) should have the capacity to provide services in parallel with each other, and to link with other services, such as housing or substance use treatment, to assist people to attend and maintain employment.

RECOMMENDATION 16: No job seeker should receive a participation penalty for failure to attend medical or psychological treatment purchased through the Job Capacity Account.

RECOMMENDATION 17: The proposed National Disability Employment Strategy, with a whole-of-government approach, developed in cooperation with a multi-sector coalition, be developed and implemented as soon as possible to ensure increased participation, recruitment and retention of people with disability.

## 4. Program design, evaluation and research

### KEY PRINCIPLES

- 4.1 The effectiveness of employment services should be subject to ongoing evaluation to facilitate continuous improvement.
- 4.2 The mechanisms for ongoing monitoring and evaluation of program effectiveness should be responsive enough to inform adjustments to program design and guidelines.
- 4.3 The impact of the operational environment on providers' capacity to provide quality services should be evaluated.
- 4.4 Evaluation should be undertaken by a policy neutral agency.
- 4.5 Research into best practice of service delivery needs to be segmented by type of disability.

RECOMMENDATION 18: The data collected by DEEWR to inform program evaluation should be available to peak bodies, researchers and other stakeholder bodies, including those that represent people with disabilities, for independent analysis.

RECOMMENDATION 19: Program evaluation should be undertaken by an independent body governed by a Partners Council of stakeholders including people with disability, academics and peak bodies.

RECOMMENDATION 20: The cost of service delivery should be benchmarked by an independent body.

RECOMMENDATION 21: Achievement of all outcomes, vocational and non-vocational, should be acknowledged in the monitoring and evaluation of service delivery. Speed to service should not be a quality measure.

RECOMMENDATION 22: A new model to monitor effective performance of service provision should be developed and implemented. This model should be structured to ensure service excellence.

RECOMMENDATION 23: A new strategy to guide engagement and consultation with job seekers with undiagnosed conditions, including mental illness and brain injury, should be developed and implemented.