



Inquiry into school to work transition: Submission to the Standing Committee on Employment Education and Training

The benefits of employment for young people with disability are at least as great as for young people generally: they include increased confidence and status, higher standard of living; financial independence, access to social networks and career development. However, many young Australians with disability are not successfully transitioning from school to further training or employment, resulting in long-term disadvantage. They are more likely than the general population to leave school early, be excluded from the workforce and experience poverty and social isolation.

Recent research indicates that over a ten year period the education and employment gap between young people with disability and those without disability has widened:¹

- A 10% decrease in the number of young people with disability in employment – 48% for young people with disability (15-29 year olds) compared to 71% for young people without disability.
- An 8% decrease in the number of young people with disability being fully engaged in education or work – 54% of young people with disability (15–24 year olds) compared to 70% for young people without disability.
- Though Year 12 or equivalent attainment for young people with disability is on the rise, it is still much less than their non-disabled peers – 68% of young people with disability (20–24 year olds) compared to 80% for young people without disability.

It is imperative that these trends are reversed: if young people with significant disability do not engage in mainstream employment by age 21, it is unlikely that they ever will. ²

Early intervention is the key. It is crucial that young people with disability receive the support required to participate in the workforce as early as possible to drive effective long-term employment and maximise the benefits of improved standards of living and social inclusion that come with employment. ³

¹ Emerson E. & Llewellyn G. (2014) *Left Behind: 2014. Monitoring the Social Inclusion of Young Australians with Disabilities*. Technical Report 1, 2014. Centre for Disability Research and Policy, University of Sydney, Sydney.

² Siperstein, G, Parker, R & Drascher, M (2013), 'National snapshot of adults with intellectual disabilities in the labor force', *Journal of Vocational Rehabilitation*, vol.39, no.3, pp.1-27..

³ Deloitte Access Economics (2011) *The economic benefits of increasing employment for people with disability*, Australian Network on Disability

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The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities includes school-to-work transition among the rights it articulates: “That learners with disabilities receive the support to ensure the effective transition from learning at school to vocational and tertiary education, and finally to work.”⁴ The [National Disability Strategy](#) – endorsed by COAG - identifies the need for high-quality programs designed to create smooth transition from education to employment.⁵

Adolescents and young adults with disability are particularly vulnerable to exclusion. They are engaged in the transition to adulthood, marked in our society primarily by educational attainment, employment, family formation and having a voice in the community. Sitting on the margins of, or excluded from reaching satisfying outcomes in these important domains of adulthood, can entrench the disadvantage experienced in childhood, multiplying the likelihood of socially excluded status in adulthood.⁶

Poor educational outcomes are one of the key reasons cited for the lower economic and social participation rate of Australians with disability.⁷

Connecting a young person with the world of work before they leave school greatly improves their chances of securing ongoing employment. Yet students with disability are often not afforded the same school-to-work opportunities as their classmates.

Many young people with disability face limiting stereotypes and low employment expectations. Specific supports such as the Ticket to Work initiative and the NDIS School Leaver Employment Supports (SLES) – discussed below - can help counter low expectations and enable more young people with disability to gain and retain employment.

Measuring progress at school

In 2016, 685,911 students (18.1%) received an adjustment for a disability in order to participate in education.⁸ Overall, there is very little consolidated data regarding these young people’s experiences and transition outcomes (past, present and projected) in Australia.

In Australia ‘general youth’ data has been collected since 1995 via the ‘Longitudinal Surveys of Australian Youth (LSAY)’, which is considered the foremost research program tracking young people as they move from school to post-school options in

⁴ UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, General Comment No. 4 (2016) Article 24: Right to inclusive education, 2 September 2016, CRPD/C/GC/4, available at: <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/CRPD/Pages/GC.aspx>

⁵ Department of Social Services (DSS) (2016) National Disability Strategy Secondary implementation plan Driving Action 2015 – 2018 Australia

⁶ Unicef. The State of the World’s Children 2011: Adolescence - An Age of Opportunity. New York: UNICEF, 2011.

⁷ Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2012) Held back: the experience of students with disabilities in Victorian schools Melbourne

⁸ Education Council: 2016 emergent data on students in Australian schools receiving adjustments for disability

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Australia. LSAY commences surveying students when they are in Year 9 and follows them to evaluate their post-school movements.

Unfortunately LSAY has not surveyed young people with intellectual or physical disability since 2007. Prior to this time all Year 9 students were eligible to participate whether they had a disability or not, which meant that students with disability were routinely included. However, students attending specialist disability schools were not sampled (data is only gathered from students with disability in mainstream schools) which has compromised the youth disability-specific data.

Australia has elected to participate in International Assessment Programs such as:

- The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)
- Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS)
- Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS).

Results from these assessments provide researchers and policy makers with information to guide planning and facilitate comparisons with other nations.

Unfortunately, these assessments exclude students with disability, leading one researcher to conclude: “this exclusionary discourse establishes that students with disability do not belong in a culture of achievement and educational evaluation, which has an impact on policies concerning educational equity and maintains the oppression of low expectations.”⁹

Further compounding the paucity of data, students with many forms of disability do not sit the NAPLAN test.

The exclusion of students with disabilities from educational data collections sends a regrettable message to policy makers that the educational attainments of students with disability (and, by implication, their preparation for the world of work) are unimportant.

Since 2015, all schools have participated annually in the national data collection for students with disability. The data seeks to identify the number of school students with disability and the level of reasonable adjustment required. Yet this data does not look at educational achievements, post-school outcomes or longitudinal progress; therefore it's difficult to determine if these reasonable adjustments lead to better post-school outcomes.

In some other countries, schools are obligated to provide school-to-work activities for students with disability and employment participation is a measure of success of education for students with disability. Some schools are benchmarked using the international statistically-verified tool, *Kohler's Taxonomy of Transition Programming* to measure the effectiveness of these transition practices.

⁹ Matthew J. Schuelka (2013) Excluding students with disabilities from the culture of achievement: the case of the TIMSS, PIRLS, and PISA, *Journal of Education Policy*

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In Australia, data to allow similar benchmarking is lacking. NDS recommends that the educational performance and school-to-work progress of students with disability be measured and tracked in the same way as other students to support accountability and evidence-based policy.

Developing work readiness

Young people with disability typically experience a higher rate of early school leaving than other students and limited opportunities while at school to develop work readiness.

For many young people with disability, school-to-work transition is a variable and ad hoc process.¹⁰ Some young people and parents have described feeling like they 'have been dropped off a cliff' once they leave school and reach adulthood.¹¹

Many young people with disability (unlike their non-disabled peers) are not given early opportunities to participate in the workforce through work experience and part-time after-school employment and there is little expectation for them to take an open employment pathway.¹²

In 2011, only 5% of special schools for students with disability were members of the Career Education Association of Victoria, while over 90% of mainstream schools were members. While a special school might have a staff member referred to as a 'transition coordinator', a mainstream school will more likely have a 'careers coordinator'. The distinction is telling and implies that students with disability will transition from school to a non-vocational disability service, rather than embark on a career.

Career action plans for students provide opportunities to develop skills that enable them to manage their pathways throughout their working lives. They assist students to develop their knowledge, understanding and experience of opportunities in education, training and employment through a goal setting process. Most importantly, they enable students to plan for and engage in the rite of passage from school to employment, which is a fundamental part of leading a normal life.

All students with disability should participate in career planning while at school, regardless of their level of disability or the type of school they are attending.

NDS recommends that the National Career Development Strategy, which aims to ensure that career education is available, fully encompasses all students, including those with disability.

Support during school is vital to the career trajectory of a young person with disability. Evidence from overseas and Australia indicates that connecting a young person with the world of work before they leave school greatly improves their chances of securing ongoing employment.

¹⁰ (Children with Disability Australia, 2015)

¹¹ (Stewart et al.2001, Stewart D et al 2010, SELLEN 2014, Children with Disability Australia, 2015).

¹² (Wakeford, Waugh 2014, Inclusion Australia 2014).

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High-quality transition services for students with disabilities typically demonstrate the following elements:

- High expectations and the assumption of employability for all young people with disability¹³
- Locally-based cross-sectoral partnership networks and practices that reflect collaboration with schools, external partners, community agencies and organisations that might be involved in supporting students in post-school¹⁴
- Participation in paid and unpaid work experience during the last years of secondary school. Young people with disability who exit school with a job are more likely to maintain a positive career trajectory than those who do not. Holding a paid job while still in high school is strongly correlated with post-school employment success¹⁵
- Vocational development while at school for young people with disability provides students with authentic opportunities to acquire important work skills and values, inform their vocational decision-making and shape their career aspirations for the future¹⁶

NDS has long believed that to improve the social and economic participation of people with disability we need effective school-to-work policy and practice. Consequently, NDS hosts Ticket to Work, an initiative that demonstrates the impact of introducing high-quality transition features in a local community.

Many nations have recognised that to increase the employment rate of people with disability, resources and policies are required that will enhance the school-to-work transition pathway.^{17 18 19 20 21 22 23}

¹³ (Kramer & Blacher, 2001; Lehr et al., 2004; Thoma, 1999; Wagner, Newman, Cameto, Levine, & Marder, 2007, Miles Morgan 2012).

¹⁴ (Noonan et al., 2008; Repetto et al., 2002; Wehman, 2010, Luecking 2009, Lee & Carter 2012).

¹⁵ (Benz, Lindstrom, & Yovanoff, 2000; Benz, Yovanoff, & Doren, 1997; Bullis et al., 1995; Luecking 2009; Luecking & Fabian (2000) Rabren, Dunn, & Chambers, 2002 Rowe et al. 2013).

¹⁶ (Grigal, Hart, and Migliore 2011, Vondracek & Porfeli, 2006, Miles Morgan 2012).

¹⁷ Office of Disability Employment Policy *Employment first* viewed Nov 2016 www.dol.gov/odep/topics/employmentfirst.htm USA

¹⁸ Eurofound (2012), *Active inclusion of young people with disabilities or health problems*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg.

¹⁹ National Advisory Group on Youth Transitions to Employment and Careers (2012) *Putting employment first for youth with intellectual disabilities*; Canadian Association for Community Living Toronto, Ontario

²⁰ Scheef A R (2016) *Developing Partnerships with Businesses to Support Job Training for Youth with Disabilities in Singapore* 1Washington State University, Pullman, USA

²¹ Nel, L; Van der Westhuyzen C; Uys, K (2007) *Introducing a school-to-work transition model for youth with disabilities in South Africa.*

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The Ticket to Work Initiative

Ticket to Work supports young people with disability to transition from school to open employment. It incorporates Kohler's key principles of best practice transition, including student-focused planning, student development, family involvement, program structure and interagency collaboration.

It is an evidence-based initiative that leverages the power of cross-sectoral partnerships to improve employment outcomes for young people with disability. It builds the capacity of mainstream services and systems to address the needs of young people with disability through a collective impact framework.

The Ticket to Work model is based on extensive research into what works. Specifically, Ticket to Work:

- brings together disability-specific and mainstream representatives from a variety of sectors to work strategically and collaboratively
- supports young people to gain access to early experiences that positively influence their views of themselves as workers
- prepares young people with disability for the workplace and gives them an employment pathway that is typical of other young adults
- increases opportunities for meaningful work experience and learning prior to exiting school

Ticket to Work networks have created over 800 jobs for students with significant disability. The majority of Ticket to Work participants have an intellectual disability and attend a special disability school. In 2016, an independent Ticket to Work pilot study of long-term outcomes (post-school) found that Ticket to Work participants:

- have higher levels of social participation, quality of life and well-being than the comparison group
- 1 to 3 years after finishing school, 86 per cent were in open employment
- are four times more likely to be in work than other young people with disability
- are almost twice as likely to have completed Year 12

Though the sample was small, the results were encouraging and demonstrated that Ticket to Work would benefit from further investment. Ticket to Work has shown that a collaborative early intervention approach can create sustainable employment opportunities for young people with significant disability.

²² Xu, Tianxi (2015) Analysis of best practice in school-to-work transition for adolescents with intellectual disability in China: implications for practice and policy Sydney University <http://hdl.handle.net/1959.13/1296609>

²³ Miles Morgan (2015) Rapid review of literature on pathway to employment for young people with disability. Centre for Applied Disability Research.

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NDS recommends that the Ticket to Work framework be adopted in the NDIS to strengthen school-to-work transition.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS)

Increasing the employment of people with disability and carers is fundamental to the financial sustainability of the NDIS. In its 2011 report on 'Disability Care and Support', the Productivity Commission anticipated that the NDIS would generate substantial economic benefits and that a key source of these benefits would be "increased economic participation for people with disabilities (against a background of Australia's low performance in this area compared with most other developed countries) and their informal carers."²⁴

To date, the proportion of NDIS plans with employment supports is disappointingly low. Only 6% of NDIS participants aged 15-24 years have employment supports in their plans – and the figure drops to 2% for participants 25 years and over.²⁵ A 'work first' approach should be adopted in NDIS planning to increase the proportion of participants who have employment supports in their plans.

The National Disability Insurance Authority has introduced School Leaver Employment Supports, a welcome move. Unfortunately, access to SLES is restricted to students at the end of Year 12, which fails to recognise the importance of early work experience and after-school jobs in building a young person's confidence and capacity. Access to SLES should commence two years earlier and continue longer than two years if there is a prospect of employment.

Disability Enterprises are a critical part of the spectrum of employment options for young people with significant disability. Securing a viable future for Disability Enterprises and the thousands of jobs they create requires satisfactorily resolving wage assessment and funding issues and promoting (across public and private sectors) the procurement of goods and services produced by people with disability.

NDS has launched the [BuyAbility Campaign](#) to promote the benefits of employment in Disability Enterprises, to make supported employment more visible as an employment option and to boost procurement from Disability Enterprises to create jobs.

The new Prepare, Trial and Hire (PaTH) Initiative

A new federal government initiative called Youth Jobs PaTH began on 1 April 2017. A PaTH Internship gives a young person aged 17-24 years the chance to demonstrate their skills in the workplace to a potential employer, develop vocational skills and improve their employment prospects. People accessing jobactive, Transition to Work or Disability Employment Services may be eligible for a PaTH Internship.

²⁴ Productivity Commission, Disability Care and Support, July 2011 Overview and Recommendations pp 54-55.

²⁵ NDIA, January 2017, COAG Disability Reform Council Quarterly Report, p 70

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In a welcome policy change, DES Providers will be able to claim a payment for completing a PaTH internship in the new funding model to be introduced from 2018. Where DES providers are at a disadvantage is that the Youth Bonus wage subsidy (\$6500 - \$10,000) is only available to job seekers who are registered with Jobactive or Transition to Work.

The disparity in the subsidies will make it more difficult for DES providers to negotiate ongoing employment for participants at the conclusion of an internship. NDS recommends that this disparity in the levels of subsidies be removed.

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National Disability Services is the peak industry body for non-government disability services. It represents service providers across Australia in their work to deliver high-quality supports and life opportunities for people with disability. Its Australia-wide membership includes over 1100 non-government organisations which support people with all forms of disability. Its members collectively provide the full range of disability services—from accommodation support, respite and therapy to community access and employment. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to State, Territory and Federal governments.

Related research NDS and its research arm the Centre for Applied Disability Research have been involved in the following papers examining school-to-work transition for students with disability:

- Centre for Applied Disability Research (2017) Research to Action: The journey to employment for young people with disability National Disability Services NSW www.cadr.org.au/lines-of-inquiry/research-to-action-the-journey-to-employment-for-young-people-with-disability
- National Disability Services (NDS ACT) (2017) Policy Paper: Enhancing employment opportunities for young people with significant disability.
- ARTD Consultants (2016). *Ticket to work pilot outcomes study*. National Disability Services, NSW <http://www.tickettowork.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Ticket-to-work-pilot-outcomes-study-2016.pdf>.
- Miles Morgan (2015) Rapid review of literature on pathway to employment for young people with disability. Centre for Applied Disability Research.

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- Wakeford, M, Waugh, F (2014), *Transitions to employment of Australian young people with disability and the Ticket to Work initiative*, Ticket to Work, [Melbourne], www.tickettowork.org.au/research/transitions-employment-australian-young-people-disability-ticket-work-initiative/.