



# **National Disability Services (NDS) Ticket to Work response to National Disability Strategy Review**

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# National Disability Services (NDS) Ticket to Work response to National Disability Strategy Review.

We welcome this opportunity to input into the strategy.

## Introduction to Ticket to Work

- Ticket to Work is a national initiative of National Disability Services (NDS).
- Ticket to Work focus is improving school to work pathways for young people with significant disability.
- Since 2014 over 1,400 jobs have been created.
- Ticket to Work is currently funded through philanthropic support.
- The Ticket to Work model is based on extensive research into what works.

<http://www.tickettowork.org.au/what-we-do/>

National Disability Services and its research arm the Centre for Applied Disability Research have collaborated with researchers and evaluators, and have a large body of work around effective school to work transition for young people with disability.

<http://www.tickettowork.org.au/research/>

## What's important to people with disability, their families and carers now and for the next 10 years and what will make a difference in their lives?

Young Australians with disability have similar career and financial aspirations to other young people, yet are more than twice as likely not to be employed or satisfied with their employment opportunities and job prospects.

During the transition from school, young people often encounter great uncertainties and tremendous developmental challenges. These issues may be more stressful with the presence of a disability, thereby increasing the risk of social exclusion amongst young people transitioning who have a disability (Kraemer & Blacher, 2001; Winn & Hay, 2009; Yu, 2009).

An independent evaluation of Ticket to Work found those young people that had the opportunity to build their employability and participate in work experience during secondary school, particularly paid work experience, were more likely to be engaged in employment post school. They were also found to be more likely to complete school and continue on to further education and training opportunities. Students also reported being more independent and happier in their lives (Atkinson, Christian, Cassidy, Rutherford, & Hawkins, 2019).

## What barriers are people with disability facing?

In the review of the current National Disability Strategy, Davy et al. (2019) found despite endeavours to improve the economic security of people with disability, their situation has deteriorated in recent years. Based on feedback from people with disability, their report highlights;

- employment of those with high support needs have declined

- over the last two decades, the labour force participation of women with disability has not increase
- there needs to be focus on disability discrimination in the workplace with this being the type of complaint most frequently lodged with the Australian Human Rights Commission
- further reform is needed to build on inclusive education initiatives (p. 22)

A University of Sydney study found that over a ten year period the education and employment gap between young people with disability and those without disability has widened (Emerson & Llewellyn, 2014).

- A 10% decrease in the number of young people with disability in employment
- An 8% decrease in the number of young people with disability being fully engaged in education or work
- 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

These trends need reversing: if young people with intellectual disability do not engage in mainstream employment by age 21, it is unlikely that they ever will (Siperstein, Parker, & Drascher, 2013).

Transition from education to employment is critical for the social and economic future of young people with disability. A successful transition to work can help towards persons achieving full social and economic participation – a key ethos underpinning the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 2006 (Stafford, Marston, Chamorro-Koc, Beatson, & Drennan, 2017).

The Convention states that learners with disability should receive the support to ensure the effective transition from learning at school to vocational and tertiary education, and work (UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2016). The National Disability Strategy (NDS) (key policy strategy 3.1) identify the need for greater employment opportunities as a key to improving economic security and personal wellbeing for people with disability. 'Economic security is critical to the wellbeing and empowerment of people with disability and underpins the ability to make progress in all other outcomes and areas of life (Department of Social Services, 2018, p. 42)'. The Strategy (key policy strategy 5.5) also identifies the need for high quality programs designed to create smooth transition from education and employment (Department of Social Services, 2016).

Improving the transition from school to work for young adults with disability has been a mainstay of many inquiries in Australia, however, it has not been well actualized and the actual process of post school transition has remained ill-defined (Children with Disability Australia, 2015). There has been a steady decrease in the rate of economic and social participation for young people with disability in Australia (Emerson & Llewellyn, 2014).

In Australia, there is a pervasive culture of low expectation, resulting in a lack of opportunities for students with disability - particularly in relation to genuine, sustainable employment. This view is sometimes held by the young people themselves, as well as parents, employers, disability providers, educators and government (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Dell'Armo & Tassé, 2019; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). To make a significant difference in employment for people with disability, there is a need to build the capacity of key stakeholders, including mainstream services.

Often programs are 'siloed', in either schools or adult disability services, pre-employment or employment services. Early intervention has often been the main responsibility of allied health professionals. This creates a dichotomous model whose division of service delivery is reflective of traditional funding arrangements by governments (Winn & Hay, 2009). A review of National Disability Strategy found a key challenge for implementation has been poor cooperation across government and insufficient collaboration with the community sector. (Davy et al. 2019).

Disability exists on a continuum, consequently, there needs to be a continuum of service responses. Post-school services need to connect with individuals while at school, with the initiation of career development and pre-employment skills training commencing prior to the school-leaving age (Kruger, Elinson, & Milfort, 2006; Winn & Hay, 2009).

### What are the opportunities to break down barriers?

The transition from school to adulthood is a time of particular vulnerability for young people with a disability. Interventions should include preventive and collaborative approaches that address the multiple causes of exclusion (Dyson, Aston, Dewson, & Loukas, 2005).

In other jurisdictions, third-party brokers, also known as intermediaries are instrumental in helping to build constructive collaborations among employers, educators, and disability service providers and mainstream youth development and employment program personnel, so that young people with disabilities are readily included in quality work-based learning. (Mooney & Crane, 2002)

Through aligning and brokering multiple services across institutional and funding sources, intermediaries play a critical role in improving employment outcomes for young people with disability (Kruger et al., 2006) .

Coordination is essential, no single system or agency is capable of providing all the required support. Instead, as young people move from the classroom into the workplace and adulthood, they often need to access services from multiple services at once to have their needs fully met (Federal Partners in Transition Workgroup, 2015).

Therefore, cross-agency collaboration needs to occur to effectively meet the diverse and complex needs of young people with disability. Intermediary could ensure effective support for a young person with disability through the myriad of complexity school transition using mainstream and NDIS supports. We believe this is a role that National Disability Coordination Officer (NDCO) or NDIS Local Area Coordination (**LAC**) services can take to ensure the best outcomes of young people with disability.

National Disability Services has been trialing a network approach to school-to-work transition using collective impact called Ticket to Work, which uses intermediaries to coordinate and support school transition.

According to independent evaluations of Ticket to Work Networks, organisational members feel they achieve better outcomes for young people with disability, in collaboration with other services than they can independently. They highlight that through this collaboration, they do not duplicate existing processes; instead, practices are coordinated and built on the expertise of network members. Collaboration supports the smooth transition from school-to-work for young people with disability (ARTD Consultants, 2017; Hawkins & Rasheed, 2016).

Consistent with the claims in the current National Disability Strategy, the most recent evaluation of Ticket to Work (Atkinson et al., 2019) confirm pathways to employment and

economic security lead to overall improvements in the quality of life of young people with disability. Those participating in Ticket to Work are significantly more independent and socially connected, (p. 21) more likely to complete secondary school, and obtain further qualifications than their peers (p. 26).

The coordinating function of intermediaries in Ticket to Work includes a significant role in building the capacity of key stakeholders in the local region, including local schools, employers, employment and training services, parents and families.

Early intervention is key. It is crucial for young people with disability to receive the support they require to participate in the workforce as early as possible. This will drive effective long-term employment outcomes and maximise the benefits of improved standards of living and social inclusion that come with employment (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011).

Kohler's Taxonomy of Transition (a scientifically-validated benchmarking of effective transition practice) outlines the importance of early intervention, with transition planning beginning no later than age 14 - particularly as adolescence is when a person develops their 'career identity' which influences their transition into adulthood (Kohler, 2016; Malanchuk, Messersmith, & Eccles, 2010; Roisman, Masten, Coatsworth, & Tellegen, 2004).

There are three basic aims in effective transition for **all** young people with disability:

- Engagement in employment, ongoing learning and/or training;
- Living and participating in your local community in ways similar to peers;
- Having active social networks with family and friends (Halpern, 1985)

Currently, many Australian students with disability receive prolonged exposure to "horizon-limiting views and experiences which can see these beliefs become internalised and the person's capacity to recognise their potential diminished" (PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2011). The earlier young people gain access to experiences and support networks that positively influence views of themselves as workers and active citizens, the better the long-term outcomes achieved.

Longitudinal studies on employment success for young people with disability identify two key factors associated with employment success after school:

- a. Hands-on, authentic work experiences during school<sup>1</sup>
- b. High parent expectations (Warfield, Curnan, Lanspery, & Hughes, 2015)

### **How we can make sure the next strategy improve outcomes for people with disability, including what community's organization workplaces and governments can do to create a more inclusive Australian society?**

National Disability Services believe we need to promote 'work first' supports that are individualized.

Young people (aged 14) accessing NDIS supports should receive an 'employment first' approach. Employment should be the priority support option in the NDIS for young people with disability, regardless the severity of disability. 'Employment first' is the preeminent vocational disability practice in many overseas countries (Blamires, 2015; Monteleone, 2016).

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**1 Note:** Work experiences created jointly by schools and adult disability providers show success in helping young people gain employment and make smooth transitions into adulthood (Certo & Luecking, 2006).

School-to-work transition supports should be offered on an automatic basis, with an 'opt-out' clause dependent on the individual's circumstances. This approach will result in:

- Increased vocational and work-related supports in participants' plans focused on economic participation
- Better employment outcomes for participants
- Increase employment supports in NDIS plans (currently at only 2.5%) (National Disability Services, 2017b)
- A decrease in community participation supports that are likely to become an ongoing annualised cost. (Currently, less than 5 per cent transition to open employment from community supports and supported employment.)
- A more financially sustainable NDIS
- Increased independence and employment outcomes and the commensurate benefit of stronger natural supports for participants

Any school-to-work supports should be based on individualised support; not group support - in line with evidence-based practice. 'Train and place' techniques have long been found ineffective, particularly for people with cognitive disability (Meadows, 2012). The most effective means of supporting this group is to provide on the job training.

For example, countries with apprenticeship based technical vocational education and training systems have lower youth unemployment rates of compared to those with predominantly school based VET systems (International Labour Organisation, 2018, p. 2). Correspondingly, evaluations of Ticket to Work show participants who engage in School-based Apprenticeships and Traineeships (SbATs) are four times more likely to be in employment post-school than students who did not, and also more likely to complete their secondary education (Hawkins & Rasheed, 2016).

Only 52 per cent of young people with cognitive disability complete year 12 or its equivalent. Early engagement with work positively effects school completion. (Atkinson, Christian, Cassidy, Rutherford, & Hawkins, 2019). This indicates support to create pathways while in school actually supports secondary school completion as well as positive school to work transition.

### **How best to measure and report whether results are improving and how things are changing for the better?**

First and foremost the National Disability Strategy needs quantitative data to assess success. Baseline data is required.

Overall, there is very little consolidated data regarding the experiences and transition outcomes (past, present and projected) of young people with disability in Australia.

In 2017, 18.8% of school students received adjustment to participate in education due to disability. The 2017 Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability (the collection) identified 724,624 students in receipt of educational adjustment due to disability. 10.4% have a cognitive disability (Council of Australian Governments Education Council, 2018), which is a significant cohort of young people in our community.

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 Australia. Yet since 2007,

LSAY has not included young people with cognitive or physical disability and students attending specialist disability schools have not been included. Data is only collected on students with disability in mainstream schools, which compromises the data on young people with disability.

Australia also participates 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) (Heldsinger & Humphry, 2010).

Results from these assessments provide researchers and policy makers with information to guide planning and facilitate comparisons with other nations. Unfortunately, these assessments also exclude students with disability, which led Schuelka (2012) 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.'

The exclusion of students with disability from data collections sends a regrettable message to policy makers that the attainment of students with disability, and, by implication, their preparation for employment is not realistic.

Since 2015, all schools participate annually in the 'Nationally Consistent Collection of Data on School Students with Disability'. The data identifies the number of school students with disability and their level of reasonable adjustment. Yet this data does not consider educational accomplishments, post-school outcomes or longitudinal progress; therefore, it is difficult to determine if these adjustments lead to better post-school outcomes and improved quality of lives.

Australia is a signatory to 'The International Sustainable Development Goal 2030'. Goal 8 indicates our commitment to achieve full and productive employment and decent work for all women and men, including for persons with disabilities, and equal pay for work of equal value. Yet ABS and other government data sets such as HILDA and SDAC do not indicate if employment participation is in open employment or under sub-minimal wages such as often occur in Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE).

Disability employment data should be published at the same time as mainstream labour market data to ensure we move towards better responses and assure all policy initiatives as part of the strategy are actually working.

Collecting statistical and research data to formulate and implement informed policies is also an obligation under the CRPD (Article 31 – Statistics and data collection) as well ensure good policy development.

The development of an effective school to work data collection framework is an imperative to accurately identify and measure outcomes.

Within the NDIS there is limited explanatory information on the evidence base consequently, data needs to be collected, which drives continuous improvement in provider practices. Data should clearly identify both aggregated and individual outcomes. Overall, there needs to be greater focus on outcomes in the NDIS data. Without adequate data, participants are unable to make informed decisions regarding choice of providers.

In their study of outcomes for the NSW Transition to Work program, Xu and Stancliffe (2019) identified significant differences in outcomes achieved by providers, with 21.8% of providers never obtaining an open employment outcome for any participants.

Logically, any data collection framework developed should provide sufficient information to support informed participant choice and ensure a competitive market for the provision of transition to employment support programs. The NDIA needs to provide real time evaluation data to transparently inform the market and improve practices.

The data should also provide information regarding the interface between NDIS funded supports and the range of employment settings for people with disability, such as supported employment, supported open employment, social enterprises, micro-enterprises and open employment. For examples of these in operate please refer to National Disability Services (2017a).

### **What can governments business and communities do to make this happen?**

The National Disability Strategy is a significant opportunity, to have all levels of government commit to a unified, national approach to improving the lives of people with disability, their families and carers, and in providing leadership for a community-wide shift in attitudes.

National Disability Services has have been heartened too-date by the statements from the NDIS Participant Employment Taskforce, and trust it will lead to improved employment outcomes for people with disability to improve employment outcomes for young people with disability, governments

Commonwealth and State government will need to collectively undertake significant work to improve school to employment outcomes for young people with disability. Compared to other OECD countries, Australia is behind in our policy development and practice in effective school to work transition for young people with disability.

### **Recommendations:**

- The educational performance and school-to-work progress of students with disability be measured and tracked to support accountability and evidence-based policy.
- Within the NDIS, a data collection framework is developed informed by provider and participant input will ensure benchmark data is available to drive informed participant choice and improved outcomes
- Effective school to work transition require governments working together. We require collaborative policymaking.
- Need to learn from overseas experience and from Ticket to Work regarding evidence base practice.
- Ensure that findings/recommendations from the NDIS Participant Employment Taskforce are implemented.
- A 'Work First' approach where employment is expected norm for all young people regardless of level of disability. Government policy should encourage that every young person with disability will have the opportunity to follow an employment pathway.

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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 around 1000 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.

Ticket to Work is an initiative of NDS that aims to improve open employment participation in Australia by galvanising local resolve, advocating for systemic change, and providing an architecture for optimal employment and career achievement for young people with disability. This paper has been informed by the experience, research and evaluations of Ticket to Work.

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