

# The Employer Experience: hiring young people with intellectual disability

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## 1. Purpose of the Report

This paper reports on the experience of employers who offer work opportunities to young people with intellectual disabilities. The paper considers three aspects of the employer experience:

- The literature identifying effective practice that encourages employers to offer work opportunities
- The factors that affect the decision of employers on whether to provide work for these young people; and
- How to best meet the needs of employers in order to increase the number of job opportunities available for young people with intellectual disabilities.

The paper concludes with a set of recommendations / links to effective practice or reports.

The report particularly draws on the experiences of Australian employers, as reported through two national studies undertaken by the Australian Human Resources Institute in 2011<sup>1</sup>, and Kantar Public consulting on behalf of DSS in 2017<sup>2</sup>. The Kantar study involved surveys, focus groups and interviews with over 1,200 employers, while the AHRI study of employers was based on 650 employer responses. It also draws on ARTD Ticket to Work stakeholder report and from studies overseas.<sup>3</sup>

Australian young people with disability are particularly at risk of being caught in the trap of welfare dependency, and it's crucial that they receive the support required to participate in the workforce as early as possible to drive effective long-term employment outcomes, and maximise the benefits of improved standards of living and social inclusion that come with employment.<sup>4</sup>

## 2. Ticket to Work

Ticket to Work is designed to support student with significant disability into work. An initiative of the National Disability Services (NDS), Ticket to Work seeks (alongside a set of related objectives) to build the capacity of employers and increase the number of employers that employ young people with a disability, particularly intellectual disability.

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Human Resources Institute. (2011).

<sup>2</sup> Kantar Public (2017)

<sup>3</sup> ARTD consultancy (2018)

<sup>4</sup> Deloitte Access Economics 2011

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Since 2014 Ticket to Work networks have engaged 2,313 employers across a diverse range of sectors who have supported young people in their workplaces in work preparation, work experience and employment. This report also includes the summary data from employer interviews with a small sample of employers regarding their experience of having a Ticket to Work participant in their workplace.

Ticket to Work uses a collaborative method in bringing key stakeholders together to facilitate open employment outcomes for young people with disability. Ticket to Work encourages the use of Customised Employment, which is an approach to the hiring, retention, and return to work of employees. Customised employment has been found to be an effective way of engaging and supporting employers.<sup>5</sup>

### **3. Levels of commitment to providing opportunities among employers**

Currently almost two thirds of employers are largely uncommitted to employing jobseeker with disability according to various reports. The findings of a 2017 study of 1,200 Australian employers grouped them into four categories, according to their attitudes towards employing people with disability.<sup>6</sup>

#### **Resistant**

31% of the employers, would require significant and almost certainly, long-term, sustained effort to 'convert' them towards being more open in their attitudes and behaviour towards employees with disability.

#### **Uncommitted**

A further 34% of uncommitted employers were amenable to influence in the medium-term, particularly if attitudinal barriers and norms are challenged.

#### **Supportive**

One quarter of employers (25%) were considered a potential opportunity. While these employers express a desire to do 'the right thing', they are often constrained and influenced by others around them and perceptions and biases built on norms and values. Converting such employers from being potentially to actively supportive may require supporting changes to workplace

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<sup>5</sup> Lead Centre (2015)

<sup>6</sup> Kantar Public (2017)

settings and culture, and helping them ‘walk the walk’ rather than just ‘talk the talk.’

### **Committed**

11% are influenced by ‘individual’ in addition to ‘business’ factors, – i.e. a personal or vested interest or strongly passionate, moral viewpoint on the issue.<sup>7</sup>

## **4. Motivations of employers to hire people with intellectual disability**

A series of factors influence employer decisions on whether to engage people with an intellectual disability. These are similar to those identified as relevant to decisions on whether to offer work experience and other forms of work exposure, and include:

- If there is previous experience in employing people with disability
- Whether the employer has a sense of community commitment
- Whether the business has inclusive employment policies
- Whether there is an established relationship with a disability employment organisation
- The existence of a personal connection to disability.<sup>8</sup>

### **The majority of Australian employers are open to employing people with disability.**

At an individual level, many employers demonstrate a moral conviction towards the treatment and employment of people with disability and display empathy with them. In some cases, employers indicate they might favour people with disability, providing they meet key recruitment and role requirements, as they want to give them a ‘fair go’. They are also driven potentially by a sense of self-gratification around giving them opportunities.<sup>9</sup>

We (as an organisation) are very big on community commitment; social responsibility comes into a play. We wanted to give someone a go, and I knew that (the Ticket to Work) opportunity and structure would work for both us and for her (the employee).<sup>10</sup>

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7 Kantar Public (2017)

8 Wakeford, M. and Waugh, F. (2014)

9 Kantar Public (2017)

10 Ticket to Work stakeholders report (2018)

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*... if you've actually done that (hired someone with a disability) – that is really putting your money where your mouth is – this is a big deal. It's not just something you can play with academically. You're going to have to accommodate someone and your team accordingly. You're going to do something that is going to require you to rethink your workflows, how things are set out, how things are laid out – and work it out according to what his needs are – it requires you to be serious about it. It's a commitment. A commitment to the community. (Middle manager, medium business, Sydney).<sup>11</sup>*

### **Personal Connection**

Some employers experience empathy with people with disability, particularly when drawing on their personal experiences and familiarity with people with disability (e.g. family members, friends). The disposition of some employers is that, if circumstances are right, they might favour candidates with a disability out of a desire to give them an opportunity to work.

*Sometimes you can have a bit more empathy with that person I think. And you can think this person deserves a chance more than others. (Middle Management, Medium business, Brisbane).<sup>12</sup>*

The existence of a personal connection to disability provides a strong influence where this exists.

*The owner has a son with a disability so they understand what people with disability go through and how much of a struggle it can be to find work. The owner himself also has a slight disability and as such knows how students with disability can get a future if they are given an opportunity.<sup>13</sup>*

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11 Kantar Public (2017)

12 Kantar Public (2017)

13 Wakeford, M. and Waugh, F. (2014)

## **Cultural fit and Community reputation.**

A large majority of employers support the concept of diversity and inclusion in the business and see the employment of people with disability as something that can enhance corporate or community image and reputation and potentially adds to the 'bottom line'.<sup>14</sup>

*We have a good environment and hire good people, we could see that giving a kid a go did fit with our culture and values and we could give him a chance.<sup>15</sup>*

*Our focus is on the community, having a young person with disability working with us shows our customers our commitment. We have so much competition in our area (other cafés), we were looking at how to make ourselves unique.<sup>16</sup>*

## **Diversity and Inclusion policies**

Organisations with policies integrating diversity and inclusion as part of an overall organisational strategy are receptive to employing people with intellectual disability. High performing organisations address diversity and inclusion at the highest level of overall business strategy. By comparison, low-performance organisations are five times more likely to address diversity only as a compliance strategy.<sup>17</sup>

Employers with diversity and inclusion policies are accepting of difference and candidates with disability are part of the mix of diversity in the workplace.<sup>18</sup>

*It just lets people know we are inclusive. We look at people's ability and not at their disability and they can support us to do our work. It was a good experience for us.*

*It's been a good experience and we are helping people to become aware (about being inclusive). I personally feel that everyone has the right to an opportunity to work and we are giving that here.<sup>19</sup>*

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14 Kantar Public (2017)

15 Ticket to Work Stakeholder Report (2018)

16 Ticket to Work Stakeholder Report (2018)

17 Employing People with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (2014) A Report by the Institute for Corporate Productivity (i4cp)

18 Ticket to Work School Leavers Report (2018)

19 Ticket to Work School Leavers Report (2018)

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There is a clear relationship between an organisation having these practices in place according to a survey of human resource professionals about specific inclusive recruitment and hiring practices. The actual hiring of people with disability strongly suggests these practices do indeed make a difference.<sup>20</sup>

### **Previous experience**

Employer views about disability tend to change positively with experience. Employers who have had previous involvement with people with disability tend to hold favorable attitudes toward workers with disability compared to those who have not. Once people with disability are on the job and performing, their work contributions address concerns over their disability in the eyes of their employers.<sup>21</sup>

*His enthusiasm and optimism. He's a very optimistic person, very happy and smiling. Very honest and open. What I like about him he is always enthusiastic to get going and be here. Very easy going and willing to help and happy to help, I could do with another 10 of him.*

Employers need 'disability confidence'. Employers with previous experience in hiring people with disability develop a strong commitment and good working relationships with them.<sup>22</sup> Previous positive experiences encourage employers to be more predisposed to hiring people with disability, whereas negative experiences make them more reticent.<sup>23</sup> However, even with no previous experience in this area of recruitment, many employers are open and keen to employ people with disability.<sup>24</sup>

### **Relationships with Employment Services**

Surveys of employers indicate they want two things:

- partners who can assist them address particular workforce or operational needs of the company; and
- competent support from disability employment services.<sup>25</sup>

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20 ILR School, Employment and Disability Institute, Cornell University (2013)

21 Leucking, R (2008)

22 Cartmel, J. et al (2016)

23 Zappella, E (2015)

24 Domzal, C et al., (2008)

25 Leucking R (2008)

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A study into the employer preference in hiring young people with disability found the 'confidence in the staff person representing the young person' was major reason for employing alongside, 'the young person's ability to perform the job'. The author arguing that transition specialists play a critical role in helping young people with disability connect with employers in the community and their ability to response to the direct practices that employers find most important in the hiring process will facilitate success. <sup>26</sup>

A lack of knowledge about supports offered by Disability Employment Services (DES) is an issue for employers. A survey of employers, without experience of employing a person with a disability, indicated over half did not know about DES, and a little less than half said the issue was not on their radar. More than a third reported not knowing about the benefits available to employers using DES, and reported not knowing how to access the services.<sup>27</sup>

Those employers that had utilised DES reported vastly different experiences.

Some employers assisted by DES reported satisfaction with the support the useful quality service received:

*The DES provided excellent service and kept us informed at all times.*

*The DES provider is able to spend as much time as we need to make the vacancy and fit the candidate perfectly.<sup>28</sup>*

For other employers, there was a view that the DES providers were not on the same page as the business:

*Even though the role was briefed thoroughly with the DES provider the candidates did not have the experience or fit the culture we were looking for.*

*Whilst we had identified the skills and level of the jobs and the managers involved were keen to employ a suitably qualified person with disability, the candidates they provided whilst having good qualifications, did not in any way match the needs of the job. This set the candidates up for failure and disappointed the managers.<sup>29</sup>*

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26 Luecking, R. & Fabian, E. (2015).

27 AHRI Research Report (2011)

28 AHRI Research Report (2011)

29 AHRI Research Report (2011)

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Findings of a 2011 AHRI survey suggest some employers hold the view that the DES service model is not aligned optimally with the way the business sector thinks and operates. Some employers expressed concerns regarding in recruitment practice capabilities, such as matching job seekers to the selection criteria.

*The DES provider was more responsive but with only one candidate offered for the identified position, we were then approached on numerous occasions with other candidates seeking placement for jobs we did not have.*<sup>30</sup>

A high-level of capabilities demonstrated by most commercial recruitment agencies include business acumen along with key account management and relationship-building skills. Disability employment support staff need to develop their understanding of business requirements rather than work from the premise of a case management approach based in social work.<sup>31</sup>

### **The relative importance of these motivating factors?**

Initial contact from a disability employment agency was the most frequently cited reason why an employer would hire someone with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD), according to an Australian study regarding the benefits and costs of doing so. The next most frequent reason was the existence of a policy of corporate social responsibility, which accounted for fifty percent of all organisations' responses. The other responses include the employee being the best candidate for the job at interview, being known previously to the employer or the employee's family approaching the employer directly.<sup>32</sup>

These research findings are consistent with the findings from the interviews conducted with a sample of Ticket to Work employers.

### **Employer motivation in Ticket to Work**

In the ARTD study of the experience of Ticket to Work stakeholders, outlined the experience of employers in Ticket to Work networks.<sup>33</sup> When asked "What was your motivation to support the workplace development of a student/s with disability?" employers selected from five options and were able to select all that were relevant.

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30 AHRI Research Report (2011)

31 AHRI Research Report (2011)

32 Scott M, Jacob A, Hendrie D, Parsons R, Girdler S, Falkmer T, et al. (2017)

33 ARTD consultancy (2018)

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All employers indicated that they were motivated to “Demonstrate our community commitment and social responsibility”, and “give someone a go”.

Motivation to support workplace development	Number	Percent
Demonstrate our community commitment and social responsibility	20	83
Give someone a go	19	79
Makes good business sense	12	50
Previous relationship with a Ticket to Work member.	9	37
Personal connection to disability (e.g. family member/friend with a disability)	5	20

Table 1. Employers’ motivation to support the workplace development of a student with disability? Employers n=24

Ticket to Work finding of motivation of employer’s overlap with the findings from Kantar Public (2017) report commissioned by the Australian government. That it is the combination of Business factors (to assist meet a business needs) and more altruistic reasons (giving someone a ‘fair go’, social responsibility and showing community commitment) that motivates employment of a person with disability.

### **5. What deters employers from hiring people with disability?**

According to the study by Kantar Public in 2017, many large and medium-sized employers lack of confidence understanding the processes around employing people with disability. Often employers do not understand how to make potential adjustments to accommodate people with disability. These adjustment may be to the operation of workplace such as management approaches, inclusion/ integration, job requirements), and to the physical working environment. It is their lack of confidence, rather than overt prejudice inhibiting employers from hiring people with disability <sup>34</sup>

On the other hand, the Australian Human Resources Institute study in 2011 identified the most prominent barriers relate to perceptions regarding the suitability and fit of people with disability to the role and their integration within the workforce.

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34 Kantar Public (2017)

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Advocates for employing people with disability in organisations often fight internal cultural battles at all levels to get results. For many the fight may be too hard and not worth the struggle against a culture which is either indifferent or intransigent.<sup>35</sup>

Top-level management is often committed to a strategy of inclusion of people with disability at a strategy level; however, the cascade of information and support systems can fade at the middle management/supervisor level.<sup>36</sup> Nearly a quarter of Human Resources professional surveyed believe there is a perception in their organisation that people with disability would not perform as well as a person without a disability.<sup>37</sup>

### **The impact on productivity**

A fundamental factor influencing employers is the consideration of the costs and the benefits associated with having young people with disability in their workplaces.<sup>38</sup> The primary motivations of many employers generally relate to either making money, saving money, and operating more efficiently. Their motivations for hiring are based on what an employee will contribute to their business.<sup>39</sup>

*I believe that most organisations recruit the best person for the job whether they have a disability or not.<sup>40</sup>*

*I did not set out to recruit a person with a disability, but decided to give him a chance based on his skills and enthusiasm. There were some challenges initially with staff and clients getting used to dealing with his disability but everyone cooperated to ease his transition and find ways to deal with inherent problems. It's a win-win situation. He is thrilled to have the opportunity. He works well, and sees this as a long-term career path, which has solved our problem of staff turnover in this area in the past.<sup>41</sup>*

Decisions to employ are primarily the result of meeting a specific operational need rather than on the relative merits of people with disability or the mission of a particular disability employment program. Ultimately, the success of

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35 AHRI Research Report (2011)

36 Bartram et al (2019)

37 AHRI Research Report (2011)

38 Wakeford, M. and Waugh, F. (2014)

39 Leucking, R (2010)

40 AHRI Research Report (2011)

41 AHRI Research Report (2011)

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linking job seekers with work is as much about meeting employers' needs as it is about serving job seekers.<sup>42</sup>

A detailed survey of employers hiring people with significant disability found the following:

- They indicate some aspect of operational improvement from hiring an individual into a customized job, such as addressing a backlog of work or meeting sales and production goals.
- They cite the competence of the employment specialist in making the recruitment successful and express high levels of satisfaction with the responsiveness and attentiveness of the job development professional.<sup>43</sup>

Focused messages to employers should include reference to the competence of the individual job candidate, the quality of the assistance the employer would receive from those assisting him or her, and the availability of the service-oriented attention to meet the employer's needs. When those needs are met, the presence of disability has no influence on the hiring decisions. Instead, the employer knows their business will receive support to ensure the employees contribute to output that will influence hiring decisions.<sup>44</sup>

### **Concerns about supervision and support**

Other notable concerns include the perception of people with disability requiring greater supervision and support, and an increased safety risk associated with their employment.<sup>45</sup>

An Australian Human Resources Institute 2011 survey found that more than one in five employers believed there was a perception in their organisation that people with disability would be high risk and potentially expensive.<sup>46</sup>

*We had to let the person go as we were concerned about their health and safety (i.e. they didn't understand risks properly).*

Employers are concerned about potential risks associated with employing people with disability, recruitment and maintenance costs, as well as lack of knowledge and access to government and relevant support to assist employers.<sup>47</sup>

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42 Luecking, R (2008)

43 Leucking, R (2008)

44 Luecking, R (2010)

45 Kantar Public (2017)

46 AHRI Research Report (2011)

47 Cartmel et al (2016); Domzal, Houtenville & Sharma (2008).

## **Self-doubt on employer's capacity**

There was also strong evidence of self-doubt among employers in relation to their own capacity of manage the employment of people with disability. This manifested in considerable levels of uncertainty around many aspects of disability employment.<sup>48</sup>

A common concern among employers (where there is not a personal connection to, or inclusive policies in place) is a belief that people with a disability could impact productivity or performance within businesses and is a significant barrier to employment for this group.<sup>49</sup>

The Australian Human Resources Institute survey in 2011 found often employers without experience of employing people with disability have misconceptions about doing so. Nearly a quarter (22.97%) of employers surveyed believe there is a perception in their organisation that people with disability would not perform as well as people without disability, while a further third (35.89%) were not sure about it.<sup>50</sup>

## **6. Influence of the employer environment**

Support functions within an organisation can help alleviate many concerns surrounding the employment of people with disability. The presence of HR departments, diversity policies, and accessible workplaces support disability employment both implicitly and explicitly.<sup>51</sup>

Organisational size (i.e. the number of employees) has the greatest impact on the implementation of these policies. Larger organisations, especially those with more than 500 employees are much more likely to have implemented nearly all inclusive practices/policies than companies with fewer than 500 employees.<sup>52</sup>

In many medium-sized workplaces, however, such supports do not exist. Instead, inaccessible workplaces, a challenging culture and the dissenting views of others present additional barriers.<sup>53</sup>

*When I worked at [large business], you could hire anyone, knowing that they'd be support for it, there's an OH&S manager – they'd love to make a case study... whereas (in a medium-sized business) there*

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48 Kantar Public (2017)

49 Cartmel, J. Randall, C., Ruhindwa, A (2016)

50 AHRI Research Report (2011)

51 Kantar Public (2017)

52 ILR School, (2013)

53 Kantar Public (2017)

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*have to be some practicalities. It makes us uncomfortable to think that it would affect our decision making but... (Middle manager, Medium business, Sydney)*

*In our companies, we don't have an HR person – so I would want to know what I should read to make sure I'm doing this correctly. I would want to be sure that I wasn't going to ask the wrong question or say the wrong thing. I haven't forgotten to do something I needed to do. I don't have that kind of training... (Middle manager, Medium business, Sydney).<sup>54</sup>*

### **Organisational Capacity**

Business owners and managers in smaller sized business are the most risk averse and likely to show poor understanding, bias and prejudice in their attitudes towards people with disability.<sup>55</sup>

Large companies generally choose their employees from job application forms, curricula vitae (CVs)/resumes, and aptitude tests and are generally better equipped to manage the hiring process. On the other hand, in small and medium-sized businesses, the process has essentially relied on intuition and turns out to be more problematic. These recruitment methods are potentially exclusionary, and in particular, for workers with intellectual disabilities.<sup>56</sup>

Within larger organisations, human resource staff are generally the most positive, showing commitment to workplace diversity, more knowledgeable about the benefits of hiring people with disability, and less likely to focus on risk. Line managers and supervisors also more likely to hold positive attitudes about hiring people with disability, but may express concern regarding the need for greater supervision of people with disability.<sup>57</sup>

Employers in manual industries such as construction, manufacturing, primary industries, services and trades express greater uncertainty regarding the suitability of the work and the working environment for people with disability. These employers similarly express concerns regarding workplace health and safety, staff supervision, and employee integration.<sup>58</sup>

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54 Kantar Public (2017)

55 Kantar Public (2017)

56 Zapella, E. (2015)

57 Murfitt, K., et al., (2018)

58 Kantar Public (2017)

Though smaller sized business are the most risk averse when employing people with disability, it been identified that the importance of the employment consultants as a facilitator of the job match was valued more highly by small and medium-sized employers than by large companies.<sup>59</sup> Good independent employment advice, information and support were found to overcome some of the issues of for small to medium businesses. Important to recognise the different approach job developers need to take when engage with small to large employers.

### **7. Information and support to assist employers**

Employers are seeking greater guidance, advice and information to address the barriers they are facing in employing people with disability.<sup>60</sup> Murfitt and colleagues<sup>61</sup> contend job placement success and long-term employment placement for people with disability requires employers to have access to ongoing support that is individualised.

The information, support and advice employers require can be tailored to their specific situations and contexts, pointing towards support mechanisms that are personalised, proactive and provided 'on the ground'.<sup>62</sup>

*(We need) greater knowledge and awareness of what is involved, the benefits for the company and how it all works.*

*Provide information to organisations - make contact with them and offer services. We have provided work experience for some young people with disability through an agency and that worked out fine for work experience but as far as permanent roles are concerned we would need more information."<sup>63</sup>*

There is also appetite for support that provides a practical support for employers which motivates them to increase their knowledge about the employment of people with disability. Many of the reported needs for information content and support mechanisms may already exist, suggesting strategies are needed to better promote and raise awareness along with

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59 Luecking, R. & Fabian, E. (2015).

60 Kantar Public (2017)

61 Murfitt, K., et al., (2018).

62 Kantar Public (2017)

63 AHRI Research Report (2011)

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optimising the use of what resources already exist to improve engagement with employers.<sup>64</sup>

*It depends on the level of disability, but at the end of the day for many businesses it comes down to cost. If the cost can be offset through government support or positive advertising or image for the company, they are more likely to employ people with disabilities. Further to that a better understanding of what people with disabilities are capable of would be beneficial.<sup>65</sup>*

Kantar Public study found that Employers want personalised and specific support and advice. Generic information has limited effectiveness in supporting large and medium business to change behaviour. Employers report that there is more value in customised and tailored support and advice, which had specific and direct practical relevance to the situation they were in.

<sup>66</sup>

Medium-sized businesses without dedicated HR teams, internal legal professionals, and / or personnel dedicated to dealing with workplace culture or diversity seek tailored support and advice. They demonstrate strongest enthusiasm due to their limited capacity in managing recruitment and workforce practices and policy. Essentially, these organisations seek support, which could act as surrogate in absence of policy and personnel, to provide them with specific practical resource and support in employing people with disability.<sup>67</sup>

### **8. Proactive strategies to encourage supportive employers**

Many employers, especially in medium-sized business, highlight their limited interaction with people with disability, and that they simply have no such candidates applying for positions in the course of recruitment. As a result, they were unlikely to take on people with disability because of this, even though they were attitudinally open to the prospect. <sup>68</sup>

Proactive strategies are needed to increase the knowledge of how to effectively recruit and retain employees with disability to increase their likelihood of employing them.

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64 Kantar Public (2017)

65 AHRI Research Report (2011)

66 Kantar Public (2017)

67 Kantar Public (2017)

68 AHRI Research Report(2011) Kantar Public (2017)

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*We are open to employing people with disability, we currently have one employee who we recently employed in our business who has the necessary skills, experience, talent they are very motivated and are working quite well in the business.*

Use of after school jobs, work experience, traineeships and apprenticeships to broaden employer knowledge. The temporary nature of work experience and work placements can flow on to ongoing work arrangements.

The majority of employers involved in Ticket to Work networks indicate involvement in supporting the development of students with disability through both work experience, after-school work and School Based Apprenticeships or Traineeships. In many cases, employers note initial work experience placements undertaken by a student can then lead into an ongoing paid apprenticeship or traineeship.<sup>69</sup>

### **Work Experience**

Placing a young person in work experience enable them to develop confidence. Work experience placements often lead to paid employment because the employer sees the young person can do the job.

*Our owner decided to offer Jack paid work after the original 10 week work experience, it is working out really well Jack has been great for the business.<sup>70</sup>*

A 2016 report on the views of employers on the impact of work placements provided positive feedback on the performance of the young person while on the placement across a number of key work performance areas. The overwhelming majority of employers were satisfied with the performance of the young people in all significant areas of performance.<sup>71</sup>

More than 90% of employers indicate a likelihood to employ another person with similar disability to the young person already employed if adequate support is provided.

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69 Ticket to Work School Leavers Report (2018)

70 Ticket to Work School Leavers Report (2018)

71 Beyer, S, Meek, A. and Davies, A (2016)

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Employers are generally positive about the impact a young person with disability has on staff productivity, the company image and on customers. Interestingly, only a minority feel an impact on the overall diversity within the company. The results suggest work placements are well received and beneficial to the company as well as the young person.<sup>72</sup>

### **After school work**

Another initiative of Ticket to Work is after school work pilot for students with disability. Employers benefit from utilising the knowledge and expertise of the Ticket to Work networks. Consisting of school staff, transition specialists, workforce development professionals, family members and youth, the networks develop an understanding of employers' needs, circumstances and perspectives. Employers also gain an appreciation of employing a person with disability and the support available for them to do so.

### **Customised Employment**

One approach to employing people with disability is customised employment, the aim of which is to connect the strengths, conditions, and interests of a job candidate or employee with the business needs of an employer. The approach enhances the opportunities of disadvantaged job seekers such as people with disability, single parents, mature workers, caregivers, and others. Leveraging their abilities to meet the needs of the employer is the basis of Customized Employment.<sup>73</sup>

Customised employment is becoming increasingly recognised as a valuable way to provide essential support for people with disability who have never worked before, and has begun to be used in secondary schools to support employment transition.<sup>74</sup>

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72 Beyer, S, et al (2016)

73 US Department of Labour, (2009) Customized Employment: Put to Work for Your Business, brochure.

74 Carter, E. W., Austin, D., & Trainor, A. A. (2012)

## **Recommendation 1**

**Make more proactive use of work trials and placements, particularly work experience and after school work allowing employers to trial employees with a disability without ongoing obligations.**

There are a large number of employers who are well disposed to the idea of employing people with an intellectual disability.

However, such employers need encouragement to consider and take on (more) people with an intellectual disability.

As indicated many employers are risk adverse particularly small to medium size business, and more proactive use of work experience would be beneficial. A key motivator to employ was the employers perception of the young person and their ability to perform on the job, work placement gives the employer an opportunity to see the person 'in action'<sup>75</sup>

## **Recommendation 2**

### **Targeted employer engagement strategies**

It is clear that one approach does not work for all employers.

It would be useful to have a simple tool or mechanism to determine where on the motivation scale an employer sits. Employers could indicate on a scale from 'resistant' to 'committed' to employ a person with intellectual disability. Clear strategies would then be required on how to move employer along the scale.

A huge potential opportunity is to explore ways to identifying and target the 25% of employers that are 'supportive' of employing people with disability, yet need active support to get them 'across the line'. A combination of social and business factors would need to be used to motivate employers into action.

Additionally, a priority would be to 'sow the seeds of future harvest' among the 'resistant' and 'uncommitted' employers by educating and shifting cultural presumptions.

The findings show a large difference in motivation and techniques to target large to small business. It would be useful to determine the different approaches required so that messaging and support is appropriately targeted.

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<sup>75</sup> Luecking, R. & Fabian, E. (2015).

### Recommendation 3

**Explore how to facilitate access to employer ‘mentors’ who can offer practical advice on a customised employment approach.**

A 2019 study of seven Australian organisations managing workers with intellectual disability, identifies more flexible and collaborative approaches to designing roles according to what workers can achieve as a key strategy for success. Workplace accommodations, such as modified or quieter workspaces, can help workers with intellectual disabilities perform to their potential.<sup>76</sup>

The study proposes job analysis and design incorporating working with each person to craft a flexible job description to the individual “instead of the out-of-dated practice of fitting the person to the job and the job description”.<sup>77</sup>

Employment specialists, rehabilitation professionals, and information providers need to spend time visiting and getting to know employers.<sup>78</sup> In most cases, the presence or absence of disability is not the primary concern when employers are making hiring decisions. Rather, the chief concern is matching a person to a specific employer’s needs.

*Match the person to a situation, not merely to a job.*<sup>79</sup>

*We are open to discussing how flexibility can work for every role in the firm, whether that’s a junior member in the mail room to partner level.*<sup>80</sup>

Demand-led approaches work best when employers and employment service providers work in partnership, often over long periods of time.<sup>81</sup> Partnerships enable information collecting interviews which are easy and effective ways to show interest in potential employers, as well as to identify potential workforce needs.<sup>82</sup>

Job developers need to have the capacity to help identify more efficient ways of undertaking work tasks, while providing employment for a job seeker with disability. A focus on stimulating demand and then presenting applicants as a hiring solution to a business need enhances credibility, demonstrates interest

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76 Bartram et al (2019)

77 Bartram et al (2019)

78 Leucking R G 2008)

79 Luecking, R. G (2003)

80 Bartram et al (2019)

81 Wakeford, M and Waugh F (2014)

82 Luecking, R (2010)

in the enterprise, and increases the respect employers have for intermediaries as 'trusted brokers'.

### **Recommendation 4**

**Focus on creating new opportunities by proactive visits to business workplaces to learn about employer needs (such as what kinds of people they are looking for; whether there are bottlenecks in the flow of work or other operational concerns that can be fixed by the strategic hiring of people who can perform specific tasks).**

Employers with inclusive employment cultures and policies in recruiting, hiring, supporting, and retaining people with disability still need specialist assistance. A primary challenge for such employers is developing their understanding that people with disability are a critical group for inclusion in their efforts toward affirmative action and building an inclusive work culture.

In addition, finding well-qualified candidates with disabilities, encouraging ongoing communication of support needs are issues employers continue to face. Those employers willing to employ people with disability can become overwhelmed with the complexity and volume of information at their disposal.<sup>83</sup>

This group of employers need supports that appreciate a demand side approach; ensuring the employers needs are catered for. These supports required tools and mechanisms to improve the matching of job candidates with disabilities to job openings. This support must cover improved determination and development of the skills needed for today's labour market, and refined tools for the linking of qualified candidates to available jobs. These supports will have a considerable understanding of customised employment strategies and be able to develop the skills of DES and NDIS providers to use these strategies.

### **Recommendation 5**

**There would be value in establishing a trusted and independent advisory service in relation to workers with an intellectual disability.**

Employers are willing to employ people with intellectual disability if given the right individualised support. This includes the provision of tools and resources

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83 Business Case Engagement White Paper, Department of Labor (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP)

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that can be tailored to particular industries, and which share insights from employers in similar businesses.<sup>84</sup>

Employing people with disability who have the skills to do a specific job can contribute to the competitive advantage, and at the same time meet an employer's Corporate Service responsibility obligations. Managers describe their focus as a synthesis between competitive advantage and meeting Corporate Service obligations.<sup>85</sup> Sometimes there is a mismatch on what employers want and what disability employment consultants or job developers think they want.<sup>86</sup>

Employers in the private sector will always have a keen interest in demonstrating how the applicant will add value to the bottom line. Job retention and career advancement are important considerations in the employment process. These strategies reduce business costs and decrease turnover. Access to compelling material on cost benefit analysis and case studies for employers without previous experience of employing people with disability would be a useful resource.

Limited data has been gathered regarding the experience of employers of people with intellectual disability. There is a need to identify good practice in supporting employers to take on people with intellectual disability.

### **Recommendation 6**

**There should be ongoing placement support for employers of people with intellectual disability.**

Based on findings from the literature, employers need to have access to ongoing support, and advice to maintain employment for people with intellectual disability.

As identified employers view employing a person with intellectual disability as a risk, though are more likely to employ when there is confidence they will be well supported and have confidence in employment support staff person representing the person with a disability.<sup>87</sup> This support is needed to be long term as an employee with intellectual disability are more likely to require additional support when new procedures are implemented, job tasks change and therefore at risk of job loss if this support is not in place.

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84 Murfitt, K., et al., (2018)

85 Bartram et al (2019)

86 Fabian, E., et al. (2011).

87 Luecking, R. & Fabian, E. (2015).

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