**The Review of Senior Secondary Pathways into Work, Further Education and Training for students with disability**

We welcome this opportunity to have input into this review.

## Introduction to Ticket to Work

Ticket to Work is a national initiative of National Disability Services (NDS) focusing on improving school to work pathways for young people with significant disability.

Ticket to Work was established in response to poor and falling school to work transitions for young Australian with disability knowing that unsuccessful transition from school holds lifelong economic and social implications for the individual, their families and our society.

While not underestimating the challenges, Ticket to Work has demonstrated in significant numbers that young people can thrive in open employment when prepared and supported whilst at school through a coordinated approach. Ticket to Work ensure effective senior secondary pathways into work, further education and Training. The Model developed from scoping ‘what works’ in other countries. That is:

*Connecting a student with disability to the world of work before they leave school through a coordinated approach, greatly improves likelihood of securing ongoing open employment and creates better economic and social outcomes.*

Ticket to Work’s connected approach consists of 31 local networks; 116 schools; 247 local organisations; 2,313 employers and has delivered 1,482 jobs for young people mainly with significant disability, the majority with an intellectual impairment from special schools.

**Empirical research is the basis of the Ticket to Work model.**

National Disability Services has collaborated with researchers and evaluators, and have a large body of work around effective school to work transition for young people with disability.

The recent evaluations on the elements of the Ticket to Work model have shown:

* The Ticket to Work model has number of social and fiscal benefits[[1]](#footnote-1).
* Ticket to Work participants post-school are substantially more likely than a similar comparison group to:
	+ work in open employment
	+ complete year 12
	+ participate in the labour force
	+ be involved in community and socially active[[2]](#footnote-2)
* Ticket to Work’s approach is working for key stakeholders (evaluation of employers, parents and network members) and is in line with international good practice and research. [[3]](#footnote-3)
* That there is a need to focus on how to get different sectors working in concert to improve employment outcomes and raises expectations. (Meadows, 2019)
* That Ticket to Work supports effective integration of mainstream and disability supports, and reduces duplication [[4]](#footnote-4)

**Employment, education and training outcomes post school**



*Figure 1 indicates finding of a comparison study. SVA 2019*

Ticket to Work participants that had opportunity to participate in work and career development opportunities at school showed improved employment, education and training outcomes compared to young people that did not have Ticket to Work support (Business as usual).

**Characteristics of the Ticket to Work Model**

Ticket to Work prepares young people for the world of work, providing them with an open employment pathway in their transition from school through a combination of vocational/career development and early contact with work environments.

Community networks are developed and leverage the power of cross-sectoral partnerships to provide individualised support, blending existing resources, coordinating, scaffolding all relevant supports for young people with significant disability.

The networks are coordinated by an intermediary, which supports development of a local community partnership, including schools, employment services, training organisations, post school providers and employers.

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
* meets the needs of employers, providing enhanced retention and profitability. .

## What are the essential skills, knowledge and capabilities students should expect to leave senior secondary schooling with to help them succeed in their post-school lives?

Young people with disability are one of the most disadvantaged groups of young people transitioning from education to employment[[5]](#footnote-5). Successful transition to work is critical to ensuring their social and economic futures. A successful transition can help a young person with disability move towards achieving full social and economic participation, a key underpinning of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD)[[6]](#footnote-6).

According to Article 27 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities

*States Parties recognize the right of persons with disabilities to work, on an equal basis with others; this includes the right to the opportunity to gain a living by work freely chosen or accepted in a labour market and work environment that is open, inclusive and accessible to persons with disabilities.*[[7]](#footnote-7).

Likewise, the National Disability Strategy (key policy strategy 3.1) identifies 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[[8]](#footnote-8)’. The Strategy (key policy strategy 5.5) also identifies the need for high quality programs designed to create smooth transition from education and employment[[9]](#footnote-9).

In this context, it is notable that a recent a [Commonwealth inquiry into school to work transition](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/School_to_WorkTransition/Report) specifically recommended that the Federal Government support the Ticket to Work model*[[10]](#footnote-10)*.

### Students with disability need to leave secondary school with the expectation that an employment pathway is possible for them regardless of their level of disability. This is not currently happening and there is much we can learn from overseas initiatives and from the Ticket to Work model.

### Promotion of an employment first response

It is our contention that young people at the age of 14 should begin to receive an ‘employment first’ approach, regardless of the severity of their disability. An ‘employment first’ approach is the preeminent vocational disability practice in many overseas countries.[[11]](#footnote-11) [[12]](#footnote-12) This approach is directed at the transition from school stage, whereby “employment is the first and preferred option when exploring goals and a life path for citizens with disabilities” and “young people with disabilities have work experiences that are typical of other teenagers and young adults”[[13]](#footnote-13).

In comparison to this approach, evidence from the Australian Bureau of Statistics indicates that 40.52% of people with intellectual disability are not in the labour force[[14]](#footnote-14) .

Similarly, according to data from the National Disability Insurance Agency[[15]](#footnote-15) only 17% of all people with disability aged 17-24 and 19% of people with intellectual disability in the same age cohort reported being in paid employment.

In overseas longitudinal studies work experience at school is the number one indicator of employment post school. A study of Ticket to Work post school outcomes found those participants much more likely to be employed post school (77% to 33%) if they had participated in 3 or more work preparation activities during high school[[16]](#footnote-16).

Young Australians with disability are not transitioning successfully from school into further training or employment, resulting in long term, often lifelong, disadvantage. They are more likely to leave school early, be excluded from the workforce and experience poverty and social isolation as a result.

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[[17]](#footnote-17).

Indeed, the gap between young people with disability and those without has widened over ten years in Australia, and there has been a decrease in economic and social participation for young people with disability[[18]](#footnote-18) including:

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

It is imperative that these trends are reversed, especially as it has been found that if young people with significant disability do not engage in mainstream employment by age 21, it is unlikely that they ever will. [[19]](#footnote-19)

Indeed, there is strong evidence of how to improve employment participation and the importance of connecting a young person with the world of work. High expectations and the assumption of employability for all young people with disability [[20]](#endnote-1) are key.

We want to take an ‘employment first’ approach because in Australia, students with disability are often not afforded the same school-to-work opportunities as their classmates. For instance

* 72% of survey respondents with disability stated they did not receive work experience compared to only 14% of young people without disability[[21]](#footnote-20).
* Only 7% of people with intellectual disability stated that their school encouraged them to take an employment pathway[[22]](#footnote-21) and
* 73% of ex-students in special school reported they had not received any assistance with job-seeking or job-placement[[23]](#footnote-22).

## How can we help students make better decisions about learning pathways within school?

## We need to give young people with disability in school opportunity to engage with career development, be supported to have meaningful work experience. We want young people to be able to self-determine their own futures.

## Students need to gain access to early experiences that positively influence their views of themselves as workers, there is need to access individualised support preparing students with disability for the workplace and giving them an employment pathway typical for other young adults.

## Students with disability need the support for their career development and to self-determine their futures.

## We need the intersection of varies sectors (disability, employment, education and training) to improve outcomes.

## Our evaluation of employers’ experience is that they are willing to give young people with intellectual disability a go if the right supports are in place.

## How do we change negative perceptions of certain pathways?

## For students with disability, there are restrictions put in place to stop them taking certain pathways and students are often discouraged from taking open employment pathways

Australian students with disability face a pervasive culture of low expectations resulting in a lack of opportunities for genuine sustainable employment. The young people themselves, as well as parents, employers, educators and government, sometimes hold these low expectations.[[24]](#footnote-23)

Prolonged exposure to ‘horizon-limiting views and experiences’ may see these beliefs become internalised and the young person’s capacity to recognise their potential diminishes[[25]](#footnote-24). Along with the young person not being able to identify their potential, parents also lose the ability to see their child’s potential and, consequently, the ability to support them to reach that potential. Expectations of parents are critical in the success of transition from school to work for young people with disability.[[26]](#footnote-25) [[27]](#footnote-26) [[28]](#footnote-27) [[29]](#footnote-28)

The wait of low expectation means that students open employment is not an option.

Young people with intellectual disability are excluded from receiving support via Disability Employment Services (DES) due to being assessed inaccurately as incapable of working as determined by the Job Capacity Assessment (JCA/ESAt)[[30]](#footnote-29) [[31]](#footnote-30). Ticket to Work outcomes have shown how wrong these assessments often are and can have lasting negative effects on the life outcomes of people with disability.

The most effective means of supporting this group is to provide opportunities for career development, work experience and vocational education. The literature indicates countries with apprenticeship-based technical vocational education and training systems have lower youth unemployment rates [[32]](#footnote-31) [[33]](#footnote-32)

Correspondingly, the 2019 evaluation of Ticket to Work[[34]](#footnote-33) showed 67% of participants were enrolled in vocational education or training (VET) as part of their senior school certificate. The majority (82%) completed their VET qualification as part of an Australian School based Apprenticeship or Traineeship (ASbAT)[[35]](#footnote-34). Of those who participated in an ASBAT, 78% were employed, 15% were unemployed and 7% were not in the labour force in 2018. These findings compare favourably to 46% employed, 38% unemployed and 17% not in the labour force, for those who did not participate in an ASBAT. These findings support the contention that participation in school based apprenticeships/ traineeships enhance the likelihood of successful transition outcomes for young people with intellectual disability.

**What students with disability need are high expectations and opportunities**

Tertiary education in Australia has become more welcoming of people from disadvantaged backgrounds[[36]](#footnote-35), and yet it hasn’t been accessible for people with intellectual disability, (with the exception of two initiatives at [Flinders](https://www.flinders.edu.au/engage/community/clinics/up-the-hill-project) and [Sydney University](https://cds.org.au/uni-2-beyond/)).[[37]](#footnote-36)

This is not the case in other countries, where ‘universities are shifting paradigms to open their doors to a broader cross section of the community including people with intellectual disabilities’[[38]](#endnote-2). The rise in inclusive higher education has been dramatic in countries such as Canada, USA, Ireland, Finland and other European countries. For instance today in the USA over 270 colleges across every state welcome students with intellectual disabilities, yet in 2004 there were only 25[[39]](#footnote-37).

The rationale for inclusive higher education is underpinned by human rights but also ‘the positive outcomes derived for young adults where opportunities for inclusion in the context of universities, colleges, and technical schools, … offers a powerful context for embedding students in the normative pathways that can lead to positive lifelong outcomes[[40]](#footnote-38)’.

Engagement in higher education leads to a variety of personal and financial benefits for people with intellectual disability, and can be an integral part of establishing a successful career path and enhancing earnings over a lifetime[[41]](#footnote-39) Students with intellectual disability have been found to have the same benefits of participation in higher education as those students without disability. This includes improved employment options, increased income, satisfying curiosity, gaining knowledge and skills; developing friendships; and increasing independence, maturity and capabilities.

There are also public benefits from increasing taxation revenue and other ways that graduates contribute to the community[[42]](#footnote-40). Interesting the benefits are not only for the student; University faculty and students without disabilities have been found to derived benefits from inclusion[[43]](#footnote-41).

The employment outcomes arising from participation in higher education have been found to be significant for people with intellectual disability: they were more likely to be employed, work more hours, earn more per hour, and were employed in a greater range of vocations[[44]](#footnote-42). Indeed 61% of students with intellectual disability in the USA who completed a postsecondary initiative had a paid job one year after exiting[[45]](#footnote-43). To put this into context, in Australia, less than 10% of people with intellectual disability are employed in the open labour market [[46]](#footnote-44).

Other benefits were found with the majority of individuals with intellectual disability that involved in inclusive education, 92% were either satisfied or very satisfied with their lives[[47]](#footnote-45).

Australia has not explored, promoted and embraced inclusive higher education for students with intellectual disability. We believe it is time to learn from oversea and conduct and evaluate trials of inclusive higher education.

## How can we support young people to make better decisions about their post-school pathways?

## There are clear indications about what works to ensure young people with disability are able to make better decisions about their post- school pathways

Sheppard, Harrington, and Howard identify six elements of effective transition to employment for young people with a disability including:

• Expectation: Young people with a disability can work.

• Local cross-agency collaboration: Different sectors can work together.

• Participation: Young people should engage in planning their future according to their interests and engage in meaningful work experiences during their school years.

• Skills development: The development of the skills necessary for employment.

• Family involvement: Family-centred transitions have better outcomes.

• Early transition planning: Early planning impact outcomes.[[48]](#footnote-46)

Ticket to Work has implemented these elements in the Australian context and shown significant improvements in outcomes (see figure one).

Currently, students are not encouraged to self-determine their futures, and there is limited support for them to do so. We have been trialling the ‘discovery’ career development model for secondary aged students (an element of customised employment techniques). Customised employment has been used overseas to support effective decision-making and improving school to work transition for those individuals with significant disability.

### The significance of collaboration

Programs are often ‘siloed’, in either schools or adult disability services, training or employment services. This creates a dichotomous model whose division of service delivery is reflective of traditional funding arrangements by governments[[49]](#footnote-47).

Young people with disability need to have access to effective supports which enable them to transition effectively from school into employment. Just as the impact of disability impacts upon individuals on a continuum, there needs to be a continuum of service responses to address the barriers individuals face. 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[[50]](#footnote-48).

Interventions should include preventive and collaborative approaches that address the multiple causes of exclusion[[51]](#footnote-49).

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)[[52]](#footnote-50).

Collaboration between schools and agencies preparing people with disability for the world of work is a key component in creating employment opportunities. Kohler[[53]](#footnote-51) identified interagency cooperation and collaboration as one of the most frequently cited “best practices” for transition planning and included it as one of five key practice areas in her seminal work, the Taxonomy for Transition Programing.[[54]](#footnote-52)

The objective of effective Interagency Collaboration is to create a system of post-school supports and activities for students over the last few years of schooling so that “their last day of high school can look like their first day after high school.” [[55]](#footnote-53)

Exploration, preparation and implementation for employment pathways needs to occur while students are still attending school and there needs to be collaboration between key stakeholders. These include mainstream post-school services with expertise in vocational training, apprenticeships and the provision of work experience, along with disability specific services with experience in teaching employment skills, school staff, families and the students.

Agrin, Cain and Gavin[[56]](#footnote-54) claim that, “by definition transition planning is an interdisciplinary endeavour” and without such collaboration, effective transition efforts will be severely compromised. Interagency collaboration is viewed as “a key variable,”[[57]](#footnote-55) “critical,”[[58]](#footnote-56) , and “universally cited as necessary”[[59]](#footnote-57) for preparing young people with a disability for post-school employment. Further, current models of seamless career transition practices leading to employment opportunities have included formal linkages between individual stakeholders and agencies as a central feature.[[60]](#footnote-58) [[61]](#footnote-59)

In the US it is acknowledged,

Neither schools, nor workforce investment programs, human service agencies, or any other single system alone can pay for and provide the array of services needed to effectively meet the often complex needs of youth with disabilities. When collectively pooled, however, these resources can produce positive outcomes for youth, well beyond the scope of what any single system can hope to mobilise on its own.[[62]](#footnote-60)

Collaboration is mandated in the US and transition services/career decision making must be provided in partnership with the post school supports.

In Australia, there is a need to further explore how sectors and systems can work together to improve career decisions and school to work transition of young people with disability. This has been the mainstay of recommendations of many Australian government inquires and agreements, and yet it remains unaddressed[[63]](#footnote-61).

We need to ensure sectors and systems support effective pathway planning.

## How can we make sure opportunities are available and support is tailored to the needs of all young people?

We believe, based on significant learning from overseas and from our experience of improving outcomes that there is a need to:

* Give priority to increasing expectations and access to employment and career opportunities for high school students with disability based on the personal benefits and public value.
* Promote a recognition that students with disability are able to thrive in open employment when prepared and supported while at school.

More specifically, there is need to increase employment participation and open employment for young people with disability by implementing the Ticket to Work model as one empirical method of ensuring effective senior secondary pathways into work, further education and training. This includes:

1. Recognition that community-based coordination (the intermediary) is a requirement for creating employment opportunities for young people[[64]](#footnote-62).

Acknowledgement that employment opportunities for these young people will not happen serendipitously; instead, they require a coordinated response with individual support, preparation and mediation of relationships with employers at a local level. This will ensure access to vocational education, work experience and career development in school.

1. Modest funding for a Technical Assistance Centre to:
	* champion the model;
	* train and support schools, employment support, mainstream and disability services/support to implement evidence based practices that improve employment outcomes;
	* promote innovation and best practice and develop resources; and
	* ensure quality and continual improvement through research, assessment, and the collection and analysis of data to ensure continuing improvements.

In Australia, we are well behind in our knowledge, practice and policies compared to other nations. This is evident from Australia’s most recent ranking of 21st out of 29 member countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in the employment participation of people with disability[[65]](#footnote-63).

**Conclusion**

The Ticket to Work model is tested and its success verified. It represents a relatively simple and highly cost-effective means of significantly increasing the numbers of young Australians with disability in open employment.

An assessment of Ticket to Work also found significant savings to government on the basis of the *financial* value of the fiscal and social impacts of the Ticket to Work outcomes. (SVA: 2019)

In unlocking its potential, it is critical to understand that Ticket to Work is a collective impact model for supporting transition from school to open employment. It is *not* a program and can be integrated into existing structures.

The adaptability of the Ticket to Work model is highly advantageous to expanding its reach. It does not require the establishment of new organisations, additional red tape nor vast new expenditure. Indeed, it is that rare case in which limited investment will deliver significant returns.

We would welcome the opportunity to discuss our findings in more detail and to answer any questions you might have.

**Supporting Documentation**

We have commissioned and conducted a significant body of research to explore the effectiveness of the Ticket to Work Model and the literature around effective school to work transition for students with disability. We are able to provide our research and independent evaluations on request.

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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 more than 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.

**Contact**

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3. Wakeford (2019), Kellott (2019), Atkinson et al., (2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Atkinson et al (2019) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
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8. DSS (2016, p.42) [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
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