

**Productivity Commission 2011, Disability Care and Support,  
Draft Inquiry Report, Canberra**

**Personnel Employment - Adelaide  
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## **Productivity Commission 2011, Disability Care and Support, Draft Inquiry Report, Canberra**

### **Issue of concern:**

Indications in the draft report and from public presentations are that participants in Open Employment will not be included in the NDIS coverage.

### **Credentials of respondent:**

This submission is focussed upon the issue of employment services for people with a disability. It is written from a long-term Disability Employment specialist provider, Personnel Employment, which is a part of Barkuma Inc., a disability service organisation providing, accredited training, accommodation and Australian Disability Enterprise services across metropolitan Adelaide.

Personnel Employment has been delivering quality Open Employment services to clients with intellectual and learning disabilities since 1986, as one of the first of the new model of disability employment services established after the enactment of the Disability Services Act, 1986.

We have delivered our services under the Block Grant, in all the Case Based Funding Trials and under the changing Case Based Funding versions during the past 10 year reform period. We currently deliver disability employment services as an Employment Support Service within the DEEWR Disability Employment Services program. While retaining a strong focus upon working with people with intellectual disabilities, we have worked with the broad range of disability types since 2006.

Over this period of time, Personnel Employment has been acknowledged as a leading provider in meeting the employment aspirations of its job seekers and the workplace needs of our employer customers:

- 1998 NIMS Benchmarking - one of top 5 agencies Nationally
- 2001 Simpson Norris Benchmarking – top large specialist intellectual disability agency
- 2007- 08 DEEWR Star Ratings – 5 - 4.5 Stars.

Personnel Employment has also been a collaborative and innovative service, having over the past 10 years established a school to work transition program in Adelaide which is considered International best practice. We have also been active on the Boards and National Committees of the main Peak Bodies, NDS and ACE National Network, along with senior management representation on high level National Committees working within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) sector.

**Current context:**

Three main disability employment programs are currently contracted by the Australian Government:

- Australian Disability Enterprises (FaHCSIA) provide facility based employment.
- Employment Support Services (ESS-DEEWR) provide Open Employment for people with a disability who require on-going employment support to gain and maintain employment
- Disability Management Services (DMS-DEEWR) provide Open Employment for people with disability who have time-limited employment support needs.

The DEEWR contracted programs both sit within the Disability Employment Services program, and are promoted by Government as being 'distinct and separate' programs.

The Employment Support Services (ESS) have eligibility criteria that substantially reflects the scope of the 1986 Disability Services Act, with participants having a disability that is permanent and would require employment support of beyond 2 years to gain and maintain employment.

As noted previously, ESS is a distinct and separate program from DMS. The clients who are determined as eligible for ESS should be included in the NDIS coverage.

**Historical context:**

Open Employment commenced in 1986 with clients being predominantly those with intellectual and significant learning disabilities. The nexus between the program design and employment support needs of participants was clearly based upon the eligibility criteria as expressed in the Disability Services Act.

The implementation of Open Employment in Australia was significantly motivated and informed by international research and evidence based practice.

We include a quote by Dr Paul Wehman, a pioneer and international leader on employment assistance and people with intellectual disability.

It was wonderful to see that this group of historically disenfranchised young people, when provided the right amount of supports by intelligent and informed practitioners and policymakers, were able to work long-term in competitive employment. Having this outcome affirmed provides yet one more piece of data in a long series of successful reports (Becker & Drake, 2003; Bond, 2004; Callahan, 2004; Drake et al., 1999; Mank, Cioffi, & Yovanoff, 2003; Rusch and Braddock, 2004; Wehman, Revell, Brooke, & Inge, in press; Wehman, Targett, West, & Kregel, 2005; Wehman & Revell, 1996) that demonstrates vocational capacity.<sup>i</sup>

After 25 years of Open Employment in Australia, we can confidently state that people with an intellectual disability can be real contributors to the economic and social life of the country.

**Risks of exclusion of Employment Support Service participants from NDIS coverage:**

The vast majority of ESS eligible clients should be DSP eligible. Planned policy changes to Job Capacity and DSP eligibility assessments will further ensure that those accessing the ESS program will clearly require on-going employment support.

The introduction of the NDIS will be a very welcome initiative for people with intellectual disability, providing resources to enable community based supports across a range of life domains.

However, if people with intellectual disability have to choose between the supports available under the NDIS or participate in the ESS program, many people with intellectual disability will, effectively, be excluded from working in their communities and contributing their skills to the economic life of the nation.

Putting aside the social costs of exclusion from community based employment (social inclusion being a key policy direction of the Australian Government), the economic cost needs also be central. People earning in the open labour market have reduced call on welfare payments.

In an environment of reducing labour availability, Australian businesses cannot afford to lose an historical source of workers who have demonstrated their value as productive, safe and reliable employees.

**Recommendation:**

Participants in the DEEWR Employment Support Services component of the DES program are included in coverage of the NDIS.

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<sup>i</sup> Paul Wehman Virginia Commonwealth University. Invited Commentary Integrated Employment: If Not Now, When? If Not Us, Who? *Research & Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities* 2006, Vol. 31, No. 2, 122–126