

February 27, 2008

Senator the Hon. Joe Ludwig
Minister for Human Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

NATIONAL COUNCIL ON



Re: Job Capacity Assessment System

Dear Minister

The National Council on Intellectual Disability (NCID) would like to provide you with the following briefing on the nature of vocational assessment and jobseekers with intellectual disability.

It is our understanding that you are currently reviewing the Job Capacity Assessment as a means of determining employment assistance access and eligibility.

We make these points in brief, due to time constraints, but would be happy to meet with you to discuss these in detail if you wish.

Brief Overview

1. People with intellectual disability and their families yearn for a transition process from either school or adult services to employment that is simple yet effective in gaining a real job.
2. They want their choice not to be undermined by fears of pension status review. This immediately clouds decision-making and the real work capacity of jobseekers with intellectual disability.
3. Open employment services that choose to specialise in assisting jobseekers with intellectual disability want to be able to work cooperatively with schools or adult services to support their transition to employment without convoluted assessment and administrative barriers.
4. Furthermore, we do not want the current scenario to continue - where jobseekers with intellectual disability that choose to work cannot access specialist assistance due to the "cap" on employment places. This simply generates more welfare rather than more workplace participation.
5. From our study of the vocational research – over a period of 40 years – there has been many attempts to design a "predictive" employment assessment. The findings of this research reveal that such assessments are notoriously lacking in validity or reliability.

6. What the research does tell us, is that:
 - a. Historically, our expectations of work capacity for this client group have been too low – leading to limited expectations and limited opportunities to work.
 - b. The decision to choose work by a person with intellectual disability, and supported by their family, are critical determinants in successful employment outcomes for this group.
 - c. Given the opportunity, the will of the community, and the skill of professional assistance, people with intellectual disability can be successful in open employment.
 - d. Intellectual disability is manifest and recognised before leaving school – and this should be a sufficient criterion to be eligible to access specialist open employment service.

7. Assessment performed at the point of leaving school should be for the purpose of outcome or “baseline”. That is, what is the current functional skill ability of this jobseeker relevant to typical development? This would provide
 - a. A sense of the degree of challenge.
 - b. An authentic assessment by which we can evaluate the impact of specialist employment assistance via a post-test.
 - c. And potentially a standardise measure by which to compare outcomes against individual differences.

Recommendations

1. School leavers with intellectual disability, and jobseekers with intellectual disability currently accessing adult services, should be automatically eligible to access specialist open employment service - if they so choose.

2. The Commonwealth should accept all people who have attended special schools or units, or who had negotiated curriculum or adjustments in regular classes or schools, as sufficient criteria for access and eligibility to specialist open employment service

3. The process must “set up” people for success. Many of our members tell us that they “give up” because the system is just “too hard”. The access and eligibility system should not be a drain on people’s motivation to work.

3. If the Commonwealth is going to maintain a “capped” program - only those jobseekers that require ongoing support should be permitted to access capped places. We recommend an external “gatekeeper” to ensure that the capped program regains its original focus on people with ongoing support needs and so redress the poor workforce participation rates of people with intellectual disability.

4. We need to be able to provide eligible jobseekers with, “report card” style information on the past performance of employment services in their region – so that jobseekers and families can make an informed choice.

5. We need to ensure that a specialist open employment service is indeed available. At the moment we have a number of world-class open employment services that specialise in assisting jobseekers with intellectual disability. Their performance records are outstanding. However, their range is currently limited to their region of

coverage – and so there are other locations throughout Australia where such quality service is simply not available (i.e. Melbourne and Hobart).

Final Comment

Minister Ludwig, in 1995 there were 4,240 workers with intellectual disability in open employment¹. In the 9 years of the Hawke/Keating government from 1986 to 1995, there was an annual average of 471 new workers with intellectual disability. In the 9 years of the Howard government from 1996 till 2005², only a further 2208 jobseekers with intellectual disability found work. This is an average of 245 new workers per year. The increase in the number of people with an intellectual disability employed slowed and then stalled during the Howard administration. The number of people with an intellectual disability in employment hasn't increased since 2003 despite a growing population.³

We are now witnessing a serious decline in the numbers of people with intellectual disability getting access to competent and successful open employment services – and hence a job.

The access and assessment pathway is but one policy area that will require serious consideration if the government wishes to meet its social inclusion agenda and goal of ensuring that ALL Australians have the opportunity to secure a job.

Yours respectively

Mark Pattison
Executive Officer

¹ Commonwealth Disability Service Census 1995.

² This is the limit of publicly released data.

³ Commonwealth Disability Service Census for 2003, 2004, 2005. The number of workers in employment are respectively 6537, 6634, 6448.