



National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy

“Hey, don’t forget about me”

Social inclusion: Helping all people with intellectual disability to get real jobs, with real wages, in typical work settings.

June 30 2008

The National Council on Intellectual Disability (NCID) was established over 30 years ago by parents and friends in an endeavour to improve the quality of life of people with intellectual disability and to fill the need for national unity and information.

The Council is the recognised national peak body with the single focus on intellectual disability, ie, our actions and priorities centre on issues that affect the lives of people with intellectual disability and their families. Our mission is to work to make the Australian community one in which people with intellectual disability are involved and accepted as equal participating members.

NCID has over 5,000 members representing all 8 States and Territories. In addition to having people with intellectual disability on its Board, NCID receives policy advice from Our Voice. Our Voice is a committee the membership of which is exclusively people with intellectual disability representing all States and Territories.

National Council on Intellectual Disability

PO Box 771 Mawson ACT 2607

ncid@ncid.org.au

61 (0)2 6296 4400

www.ncid.org.au

Rob Allen, President

Mark Pattison, Executive Director

Our Submission . . . in Brief

The National Council on Intellectual Disability (NCID) welcomes the opportunity to comment on a proposed National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy.

In this submission we set out an historical context of how our knowledge of employment assistance to people with intellectual disability has evolved. We also set out the core findings of vocational research for this group of jobseekers spanning the last 30 years.

We have set out six “big ideas” that we consider are central to building a national strategy of employment assistance to people with intellectual disability that are coherent with the research evidence. These six ideas are not exhaustive but indicate areas of priority from our analysis of the current Commonwealth program of employment assistance.

We need to build a national strategy for school leavers and jobseekers with intellectual disability based on the following key research finding:

People with intellectual disability have the ability to successfully work in open employment given competent on the job training and long term support.

A national strategy of employment assistance consistent with the research evidence would include:

- An eligibility and access pathway to open employment assistance based on a presumption of employability in open employment.
- An equal opportunity for all school leavers with intellectual disability to try open employment assistance as a first choice.
- The availability of a competent specialist open employment assistance provider for jobseekers with intellectual disability in every labour market region.

To deliver this national strategy we recommend that the Commonwealth:

1. Create a sub-branch within DEEWR charged with the goal of increasing the open workforce participation of jobseekers who require on the job training and long term support.
2. Ensure that every school leaver with intellectual disability who chooses open employment is eligible to receive assistance without limitation.
3. Empower and inform families and jobseekers with the data outcomes of contracted services by publishing the performance outcomes as “report cards”, together with annual national performance data summaries.
4. Establish a national training and technical assistance strategy to assist disability employment staff with implementing evidence-based strategies in achieving inclusive employment outcomes.

5. Develop a national interface with secondary education from about the age of 14, which provides students with the opportunity for paid work and authentic skill preparation before they leave school.
6. Minimise the fear of families and jobseekers about the disability support pension eligibility by encouraging the choice of work without loss of pension eligibility.

Our expectations are high. And they should be given the research evidence and 30 years of demonstrating positive open employment outcomes for this group of jobseekers.

Open employment outcome rates, however, for people with intellectual disability are shamefully low and beginning to fall. The majority of school leavers with intellectual disability move on to unemployment day programs or old segregated programs that are remnants of a false set of assumptions about the capacity of people with intellectual disability to learn and work.

We have the technology and professional expertise to provide an opportunity for all people with intellectual disability to secure open employment. We then must add the missing ingredient - ***our commitment and will to do it*** on a national scale.

History (Introduction)

To address the barriers to employment for people with intellectual disability, and implement an effective national strategy of employment assistance, will require in part, an understanding of our historical response to this grouping of people.

An understanding of our historical response reveals the magnitude of the attitudes and barriers that people with intellectual disability and their families confront when choosing to participate in open employment.

Our historical response has been characterised by negative attitudes and false assumptions about learning and work capacity for this group. It is a history dominated by the *social and economic exclusion* of people with intellectual disability.

If we look briefly at the major societal responses of the twentieth century, people with intellectual disability were subject to:

- eugenic strategies of sterilisation and segregation based on a belief that this group was a threat to the well being of society and the future of humanity;
- mass institutionalisation in places compared to a *snake pit* by US Senator Robert Kennedy in 1965; and,
- segregation from other children in regular classrooms, and other adults in regular work places based on rejection, not research or pedagogy.

These responses created public myths and misunderstandings about the capacity of people with intellectual disability to learn, to learn alongside peers in typical classrooms, and work with co-workers without disability in typical workplaces.

The remnants of this old thinking continue today. Only a small percentage of school leavers with intellectual disability move into open employment (~10%). The majority of school leavers (~90%) are guided towards segregated employment programs (sheltered workshops/business services), unemployment programs (day activity programs) or vocational pathways that invariably are weak in achieving positive employment outcomes.

We still act as if people with intellectual disability need to be labeled, grouped together, and segregated from a real job in the community. We still act as if this has research legitimacy in the research field of employment or vocational assistance.

What we propose in our submission is that a national strategy of employment for people with intellectual disability must act in a way that is coherent with both our stated value of social inclusion, and the vocational research that school leavers with intellectual disability CAN be supported into open employment given competent professional support and long term commitment to the maintenance of this outcome.

Changing attitudes and practices, however, is no small feat when 3,500 years of recorded human history has been dominated by the societal rejection of people with intellectual disability. Our historical habit is significant in size. And it blurs our understanding of developmental and inclusion.

When we understand the magnitude of this historic habit we begin to see the size of the *elephant in the room* when considering a national employment strategy for people with intellectual disability within a policy framework of *social inclusion*.

Yet we can do this, if we have the will to do it.

We propose a national strategy of open employment assistance based on research evidence and outcomes. This will challenge our natural inclinations and historical habit, but it will provide a coherent strategy to a policy of social inclusion.

Research Evidence

For most of the 20th century, the *state of art* assistance to adults with intellectual disability was via practices of segregation via institutions, day activity programs and sheltered workshops.

We had assumed that people with intellectual disability were unable to learn productive work skills required by the open workforce. Many languished in institutions or stayed at home.

From the 1950s, sheltered workshops and day activity programs appeared more humane and provided families with something other than institutionalisation.

However, these forms of programs were not built on vocational research, but rather was a response to rejection by society. In the face of this rejection, families organised to build and operate their own classrooms and places to go to during the day for their sons and daughter.

With over 30 years of vocational research on inclusive employment we now know much better. There is a large body of international research and demonstration that people with intellectual disability **can** work in open employment given competent instruction and long-term support. In the face of a policy of social inclusion, we no longer need to build separate classrooms or separate workplaces - we have inclusive employment technologies ready to go.

Beginning in U.S.A., demonstrations from the 1970s, followed by replication in Australia from the 1980s, open employment for people with intellectual disability has a research and practice spanning more than 30 years.

The core research findings are that:

- Individuals with intellectual disability have the capacity to learn productive job skills. The teaching of job skills is one of the most important technical competencies that employment providers need to successfully place and train a jobseeker with intellectual disability in a job.
- Individuals with intellectual disability are capable of securing typical jobs within their communities via place, train and support models of assistance. If we were to review the most successful employment assistance models, the “place and train” model demonstrates significantly superior outcomes in terms of wages, hours, retention, and social inclusion.

- Successful demonstrations of open employment include people with significant intellectual disability in moderate, severe and profound classifications. High support needs does not preclude one from open employment. An important fact, (but poorly understood), is that open employment models are successful for the range of intellectual impairment. This is the same group of people who today are guided to business services or day activity programs. We cannot legitimately or professionally advise a school leaver to go to a business service or day activity program on the basis of research evidence. It is not a need - only but a choice.
- Family support, and the motivation of the jobseeker to work are critical “home” factors for open employment success. This research finding emphasises the need for families and students to be well informed of the research findings and for secondary schools to begin providing students with the opportunity to develop early skills and experiences toward making open employment their first choice.
- Secondary school preparation is now understood as *early intervention* for preparing future skills for open employment success. The research is suggesting that education to be a means to an end. Families, students and educators need to consider the impact of educational planning decisions from about the age of 14 in terms of ‘what should I be doing now to enhance the likelihood of getting a job in open employment. The research is now pointing to the need for all individuals with significant support needs to have paid employment before they leave school.
- Two core practices are linked to successful outcomes; (i) on-the-job training and support, (i.e. teaching skills); and (ii) ongoing long-term support for the employer and employee to maintain skill, productivity, and support structures. The assessment of employment assistance is now understood as not only a matter of determining the skills or capacity of a jobseeker, but also the competency and capacity of the local employment assistance provider.
- Wages & integration outcomes in open employment significantly exceed outcomes achieved by alternative programs such as day activity programs and sheltered workshops [business services] - even by those with severe intellectual disability.
- Open employment agencies that specialise in assisting jobseekers with intellectual disability tend to get better outcomes when compared with generalist disability employment agencies. In a Commonwealth review of best practice in open employment it was noted that: *There was a significant correlation between outcome quality and the size, disability specialisation, age, and accessibility (or remoteness) of the open employment service. Services that focus solely on open employment tend to achieve higher outcome quality than those that combine open and supported employment services. Those services in which a specialised unit (as distinct from specialist staff) has been established for a specific group of clients tend to achieve a better mean quality of outcomes across all of their clients.*¹
- “Preparation”, “readiness”, or “flow through” models that begin jobseekers in sheltered workshops (business services) or day activity programs only achieve a 3-5% outcome in moving people with intellectual disability through to open employment. We have known for at least 30 years that this popular idea of preparing and teaching skills to people with intellectual disability in day activity

programs or business services rarely leads to successful placement in open employment. This is well known in the research on generalisation and transfer of skills. It is why *place and train* open employment models have been far more successful for the same client group - the only difference being the application of a research based model of assistance.

- Open employment programs for people with intellectual disability achieve success rates from on average around 30% to as high as 80% in our best performing programs. Four out of the fifteen employment outlets that scored 5 stars (i.e. being the best) from DEEWR were from an open employment agency that specialises in assisting people with moderate to severe intellectual disability get open employment jobs. This is the benchmark that we should be shooting for in the design of a national strategy. It is this level of quality service and outcomes that we want for all school leavers with intellectual disability in every labour market region.
- Open employment programs are more cost efficient than alternative segregated or day programs. The research and demonstration that people with significant intellectual disability can work in open employment should be sufficient enough evidence for the Commonwealth to invest in this model of employment assistance. However, the research also tells us that this is cheaper than supporting people with intellectual disability in business services or day programs. So the Commonwealth can achieve an increase in the open workforce and achieve its policy of social inclusion and even save some money to boot!

The overwhelming research evidence provides the Commonwealth with a firm basis for a national employment strategy built upon a “presumption of employability” and open employment as the “first choice” for jobseekers with intellectual disability.

If we were to have a coherent strategy that provides action to the words of the Commonwealth’s social inclusion policy in which everyone has the opportunity to secure a job, then a national strategy would provide school leavers and jobseekers with intellectual disability with:

- The choice to work in open employment - as a first choice.
- A presumption of employability, via eligibility and assessment processes.
- Access to a specialist service competent in open employment assistance to people with intellectual disability via the demonstration of positive employment outcomes.

If we were to follow evidence based practices:

- A secondary school, student and family would collaborate and consult with a specialist open employment agency from at least the age of 14. This planning would prepare paid work experiences and authentic instruction and assessment of skills required upon leaving school.
- A school leaver would have an established relationship with an open employment agency as a matter of course upon leaving secondary school.
- A specialist agency would be able to draw sufficient resources to initiate assessment, job search, job placement, on the job training, and long term support strategies.

This should be typical and expected. It should be simple, timely and efficient.

Our aim in designing a national strategy should be to ensure that the school leavers of 2008, 2009, 2010 and beyond are included in our community as “workers” in open employment. This is social inclusion.

We should be in a position to celebrate our commitment to social inclusion by reporting that that more than 50% of school leavers with intellectual disability are supported in real open employment jobs by 2012. This is a modest target. It is however considerably more than the open employment rate of 10% that we currently achieve via present strategies.

We need to set high expectations to replace the low expectations that keep many people with intellectual disability dependent on the pension, unemployment, and looking for alternatives for the most valued adult role in a society - a valued worker!

The research says we can. The demonstration of the research in Australia says that it is real and happening in some locations. The question is: do we, as a nation, have the will to implement a national plan to do this in every labour market region?

National Strategy Idea 1

A sub-branch within DEEWR charged with the goal of increasing the open workforce participation of jobseekers who require on the job training and long-term support.

We recommend that DEEWR implement a different jobseeker stream for those identified as requiring on the job training and long-term ongoing support. And that a sub-branch within DEEWR manages this jobseeker stream.

The Commonwealth should deliver a service contract policy that supports and fosters evidence based practice and positive open employment outcomes for jobseekers with intellectual disability.

A core objective of the Commonwealth program should be to increase the open employment participation rate of people with intellectual disability. It is this outcome data that we should use to evaluate the effectiveness of the Commonwealth program in achieving this objective.

Currently, we see a significant disconnect between the management of the Commonwealth program and the research evidence of best practice in open employment for people with intellectual disability.

We see three trends that currently work against the inclusion of jobseekers with significant intellectual disability to secure open employment.

1. A trend to discount the ability of people with moderate to severe intellectual disability to work in open employment.

2. A trend towards the design of funding models that emphasize “flow through” of clients to the status of “independent worker”.
3. A trend away from specialisation in open employment agencies to generic service.

We need to understand that the open employment agencies that currently achieve the highest outcomes for people with intellectual disability are *specialists*. That is, they specialise in jobseekers with the label of intellectual disability; they have a passionate interest in the rights and inclusion of people with intellectual disability; they have learned and continue to learn the skills of training and supporting people with intellectual disability on the job; and they are in it for the long-term to monitor and support the employee throughout their career.

The data suggests that the most beneficial employment service option for jobseekers with intellectual disability is to have an open employment service that specialises in assisting this group.

The research suggests that a Commonwealth program - if guided by the research - would operate on the basis that:

- Jobseekers with intellectual disability can work in open employment
- Jobseekers with intellectual disability can work in open employment and require access to a specialist open employment service competent in the latest vocational research based practices
- Open employment services for jobseekers with intellectual disability require funding, contracts and outcome measures that are congruent with key practices of on the job training and ongoing long term support

We believe that a national strategy requires a discrete sub-branch within DEEWR focused on jobseekers who require on the job training and long-term ongoing support as a major safeguard against the marginalisation of this group of jobseekers. While still integrated within the greater employment program - the sub-branch would have as its key goal the building of an inclusive employment sector for jobseekers who require on the job training and long-term support.

We are therefore recommending a separate employment assistance stream for jobseekers who require on the job training and ongoing long term support. This group of clients should be identified as such so that a differentiated management system can be developed due to the different model of assistance for this group when compared to jobseekers who do not require ongoing support.

This will have the following benefits for our constituents:

- It will provide an image and message that people with significant intellectual disability can work. And that the Commonwealth has a strategy to ensure that the social inclusion policy encompasses jobseekers with intellectual disability.
- It will enable the Commonwealth to ensure that every labour market region has the capacity and competency to respond to the choice of families and school leavers with intellectual disability who want to work in the open labour market.

- It will provide an opportunity for the Commonwealth to monitor and track the employment outcomes for this group and ensure that planning and policy for this group of jobseekers is informed by performance outcomes.
- It will provide the Commonwealth with the ability to provide nuanced variations to funding and quality policies to support the needs of clients who have the need for a model of delivery that is characterised by on-the-job training and long term ongoing support through their career.
- A discrete sub program would also be in the position to create cooperative linkages with secondary and tertiary education and training programs.

National Strategy Idea 2

Every school leaver with intellectual disability who chooses open employment is eligible to receive assistance

To be socially included, all Australians must be given the opportunity to secure a job (Gillard & Wong - An Australian Social Inclusion agenda)

To be socially inclusive, the national strategy of employment should ensure that every school leaver with intellectual disability has the opportunity to secure job. Each school leaver should have access to a specialist open employment service for people with intellectual disability.

Today, however, many school leavers with intellectual disability, who currently want to work in open employment, are unable to get access to specialist open employment assistance.

People with intellectual disability are typically eligible for employment assistance from the “capped” program administered by DEEWR. Specialist open employment services, however, are limited by contract in how many jobseekers they can provide assistance to. When demand is greater than the funded capacity, jobseekers *miss out* on an *opportunity to secure a job*.

The national strategy needs to address this in order to deliver on its promise of social inclusion - that *all Australians must be given the opportunity to secure a job*.

If there are limited places of assistance, jobseekers with intellectual disability are left with options unlikely to lead to a real job (i.e. sheltered workshops, day activity programs). Other generic employment services, (which may have available places), may lack the specialist competency or interest to address the employment needs of jobseekers with intellectual disability.

Our national strategy solution is to ensure that all school leavers with intellectual disability have the opportunity to access specialist open employment assistance as seamlessly as possible from secondary school.

Short term crisis

There is insufficient capacity in the current Commonwealth program to accommodate the 2007 school leavers with intellectual disability.

We urgently need immediate short-term solutions to respond to the needs of those school leavers who have chosen work but are prevented by the current system of the “cap” and currently sit idle on welfare payments.

Reallocating underutilised capacity across the sector could accommodate the current waiting list. This provides an efficient solution to money already appropriated. A

reallocation of places should be given to specialist services that have a demonstrated demand and above average outcome performance record.

Capacity could be increased at no cost, or minimum cost, and costs could even be reduced if the following measures were adopted.

- Limit entry to the capped DEN program to people with ongoing support needs.
- The capped DEN program is currently operating with unused capacity. Approximately 2000 unused places could be re-allocated.
- If the two measures above are insufficient, a 10% capacity increase, or approximately 4000 places, would cost only \$25,000,000 p.a. Combined with re-allocation this would meet demand requirements for the life of this 3 year parliament.

Long-term solution

While we suggest a short term solution based on current appropriation measures to address unmet demand, we believe that a national strategy must be able to immediately support the decision of a jobseeker with intellectual disability to try open employment upon leaving school.

Consideration must be given to budgetary planning based on expected demand to ensure that quality services are not restricted in assisting young people to seek a job in open employment. Otherwise consideration should be given to a responsive system that permits quality services to draw Commonwealth resources based on the choice of school leavers to work in open employment.

Whatever specific solution we pursue, we need a national strategy that can respond to the open employment needs of school leavers with intellectual disability rather than the Commonwealth system being of itself a barrier to social inclusion.

National Strategy Idea 3

Empower and Inform Families and Jobseekers with the Data Outcomes of Contracted Services

Publish the Performance Outcomes of Specialist Open Employment Services, a National Performance Data Summary, & Service Report Cards

We believe that comparative data on performance outcomes should drive the development of professional practice and in the granting of Commonwealth contracts.

We are pleased that DEEWR have established a system of performance outcome reporting – i.e. the Health Checks - and the associated star rating system that has been published on the internet.

We believe this direction, whilst very good, can be improved to provide an even greater level of information and transparency to jobseekers, their families, and the community in general.

We would like the Commonwealth to publish national summary performance outcome data, which includes data about the workforce participation rates of jobseekers with intellectual disability. The summary should include information on how the program performed in terms of job placement, job retention, weekly wage rates and hours of work. This data should be published to permit analysis and evaluation of a national strategy of employment assistance.

Currently, performance data is only provided to contracted services, which is benchmarked against national and local labour market regions. There is no national summary or public transparency of performance.

We would like the Commonwealth to publish service report cards that set out the performance outcomes of each service in terms of number of jobs, wages, hours of work, retention, related to particular groups of jobseekers (i.e. jobseekers with intellectual disability). This would be a brief summary of the health check data alongside the star rating.

Transparent service summary data (in the form a “report card”) would provide jobseekers and their families the ability to compare and contrast performance outcome results of contracted employment services in their region.

Providing transparent service performance data to families and clients will have a significant impact. Clients are likely to make informed decisions and gravitate towards better performing services which should (1) increase the quality and rate of workforce participation, and (2) provide an impetus for improvement from services to attract clients via quality performance outcomes.

National Strategy Idea 4

National Training & Technical Assistance

There is a range of quality practice, models of assistance and performance outcomes currently being contracted by the Commonwealth. These range from world class to average to poor. A significant variable in this range of quality is the professional knowledge of effective practice held within each of these professional agencies.

A national strategy of employment for people with intellectual disability must include a national training and technical assistance to assist disability employment staff with implementing evidence-based strategies in achieving inclusive employment outcomes.

The research field on assisting jobseekers with intellectual disability is a rich base of knowledge spanning applied behaviour analysis, positive behaviour support, explicit instruction in teaching job skills, structures of ongoing support, building relationships with co-workers and employers, marketing, long term support and monitoring, and more.

There is a need for a process whereby knowledge, practice and information can be shared with agencies in order to improve employment assistance and outcomes for people with intellectual disability.

We have a small number of world-class professionals and services that currently possess this base of knowledge. In order to increase Australia's capacity to include jobseekers with intellectual it is important that this knowledge is passed on to a larger number of professionals and to subsequent generations of personnel working in this field.

The Commonwealth could fund a cooperative agreement between NCID, specialist employment services for people with intellectual disability, and a tertiary institution, to design and deliver national training and technical assistance. The mission would be to increase inclusive employment outcomes for individuals with intellectual disability.

Training and technical assistance would offer:

1. Identification of good employment assistance practices based on research evidence.
2. Evaluation of services and identification of practices that can be improved.
3. Linking services with other services identified as best practice exemplars of particular practices
4. Staff training based on research based practices
5. Publishing and disseminating innovation practices through journals and online distribution methods

A central theme of this work is around practices supported by the research and demonstration of positive employment outcomes.

We also see this as giving the profession a sense of "ownership" over its expertise and craft. We believe this fits with a developmental model that would allow best practice to drive quality and an avenue for poor performers to tap into professional assistance to improve and respond to Commonwealth concerns over performance.

National Strategy Idea 5

School to Work (Commonwealth State Collaboration)

A critical life transition is when young people with intellectual disability are in the later years of secondary school or upon finishing secondary school. It is at this juncture that we see the need to develop collaborative arrangements across commonwealth and state jurisdictions, and particularly across education and employment portfolios.

The research evidence now points to the importance of secondary school as being a time of *early intervention* in preparation for employment. We know that paid employment while in school directly relates to paid integrated employment in adulthood. We also know that typical experiences in inclusive settings at school and in non-school settings provide adaptive skills in preparation for the expectations of the *real* world of work.

There is an opportunity to look at collaborative models of of employment preparation assistance across schools and specialist open employment agencies that provide a *joined up* solution for students and families seeking a smooth and effective transition to employment.

A national strategy of employment for people with intellectual disability provides an opportunity to create an infrastructure of education and employment “joined-up-ness”.

We envisage collaboration between specialist open employment agencies secondary schools, families and students as to what skills and competencies are beneficial to achieving an open employment pathway.

For students with intellectual disability it is critical that they can begin to develop vocational employment opportunities in their final years of schooling and develop authentic work skills and experiences.

We see an urgent need to review current state education and training processes and programs as to their research validity and performance in achieving employment outcomes for secondary students in Year 10 to 12 and when leaving school.

The *NSW Transition to Work* program and the *South Australian School to Work* program are promising developments. NCID consider that these State transition programs offer the Commonwealth an opportunity to begin discussions with State governments on how a co-operative system could operate to provide a coordinated employment service response to secondary students and school leavers with intellectual disability.

National Strategy Idea 6

Minimise Fear

Leaving school, seeking work, and becoming a part of the adult world is a momentous time for young people and their families. In many respects it is the culmination of two decades of love and investment by families and education systems. For students with intellectual disability and their families it is a also a period of heightened anxiety.

If one takes the time to speak to those professionals who have been providing open employment assistance to people with intellectual disability for over two decades, you will hear about the fear and trepidation many parents feel about trying open employment. Concerns about safety, support, and whether open employment is possible or not. It is a time of taking risks in a new environment.

The original design of open employment assistance was predicated on the promise that you can keep your disability support pension status. This was a deliberate policy to minimise the fear of families about the future social security of their son or daughter. Trying open employment would not put at risk the pension.

The Howard government changed this policy which linked choosing to work to triggering a review of one’s pension status. This simply resulted in increasing the fear of families and

school leavers and away from trying open employment. For some it is far more important to keep the pension than to seek work.

We recommend that a national strategy of open employment assistance to people with intellectual disability needs to minimise the fear of families and school leavers and instead take active steps to encourage open employment assistance as something positive and realistic.

We recommend that the Commonwealth simply encourage people with intellectual disability and their families to access quality specialist open employment services. The Commonwealth should incentivise the goal of the jobseeker to work as many hours as possible for the greatest amount of wages as possible.

The only impact we suggest on the pension is via the income and assets test - where earned income reduces the full pension to a part pension. But not a review of the pension eligibility itself. This arrangement we believe to be fair and positive. Most importantly, if open employment is not successful for whatever reason, the family and jobseeker are reassured that the pension eligibility is constant.

This arrangement would allow open employment services to create an expectation of possibility and “try” and minimise the fear of negative effects upon pension eligibility.

Appendix 1: Data on the open employment of people with intellectual disability in Australia

It is difficult for NCID to provide accurate figures on the open workforce participation rate of people with intellectual disability. The available data from the Commonwealth program is difficult to obtain or glean from current public data collections.

In preparation for this submission we requested workforce participation data from Commonwealth government including data from the DEEWR's health check data and from FHCSIA's disability census data. We have not had any formal response to this request to date bar a phone call from a Commonwealth officer at DEEWR saying that our request is being considered.

It is our contention that the Commonwealth open employment assistance program needs good publicly transparent data so that we may all determine current rates of success, determine best practice, and guide us in how to roll out a national strategy of best practice for jobseekers with intellectual disability.

From our examination of the Commonwealth Disability Census Data we have determined that the numbers of people with intellectual disability have been falling. We have also been able to determine that the number of people with intellectual disability in paid work has at least stagnated and appear to be falling.

<i>Census</i>	<i>Access Open</i>	<i>No. Employees</i>
2003	12,668	6,537
2004	12,447	6,634
2005	12,325	6,448

From our examination of the data available from the Disability Census and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare we note that for people with intellectual disability between the ages of 15 and 64, that data for 2005-2006 indicate that 12,325 accessed open employment in the year 2005. 6,448 people with intellectual disability were working in open employment in 2005.

Using the data from AIHW we can determine that the open employment rate of all people with intellectual disability is about 10% (6,448).

90% of people with intellectual disability of working age are not in open employment (55,685).

This provides us with the size of the issue. A national strategy for the open employment of people with intellectual disability needs to be 900% more powerful if we are to realise the full potential of this underemployed group.

Appendix 2: The proposed competitive tendering of disability employment assistance.

Problem

Competitive tendering for open employment services which specialise in assisting people with intellectual disability will be counterproductive to building a system that can respond to this group of jobseekers.

Why is competitive tendering a risk to jobseekers with intellectual disability?

The original target group of the Commonwealth open employment program was jobseekers with intellectual disability that required long term ongoing support. This program, however, has gradually shifted to the needs of a wide range of jobseekers with disability labels.

Services have responded to this shift by becoming “generic” and providing service to this diverse group. Some services have also broadened their focus to clients across both disability and job network clients.

We have witnessed a gradual *squeezing out* of jobseekers with intellectual disability in the capped program. As a result there has been a decrease in the number of new workers with intellectual disability getting work each year. The total number of workers with intellectual disability in the workforce hasn’t increased since 2003.

Instead we have seen a focus on jobseekers who fit a model of “flow through” – where clients can be placed, supported, and then deemed independent of requiring ongoing support.

Jobseekers with intellectual disability, however, require a different model of employment assistance that features *on the job training and long-term ongoing support*.

Plans to competitively tender employment assistance for jobseekers with disability will only add momentum to this shift away from jobseekers with intellectual disability and/or jobseekers that require ongoing support.

We also fear that competitive tendering will increase the difficulty of building and developing a network of specialist providers for jobseekers with intellectual disability. Yet it is these specialist providers that achieve the best outcomes for people with intellectual disability.

Ultimately, tendering employment service contracts will only exacerbate the negative trend on the workforce participation rate of people with intellectual disability.

Solutions

As an alternative to the proposed competitive tendering of service contracts we propose a set of contract arrangements that are linked to a policy of social inclusion, achievement of positive outcomes, and the right for all to have the opportunity to secure a job.

1. Ensure the future availability of open employment services that specialise in assisting jobseekers with intellectual disability. This model of service is a major safeguard in ensuring that this knowledge and professional practice is maintained.

2. Ensure that jobseekers with intellectual disability have a quality specialist (intellectual disability) open employment service in their community or region.
3. Empower clients and family members to make informed decisions about which employment assistance provider they wish to choose. We suggest that *service report cards* indicating performance outcomes should be provided to jobseekers with intellectual disability and their families to assist in choosing an employment service.
 - 3.1. We need to reveal to clients and families the range of quality that exists within regions and across Australia. Such informed decision making we believe will create its own momentum for change in service quality.
4. Monitor performance outcomes to maintain high standards of service practice and outcomes. Performance data should be used as the basis for capturing best practice. Data should be published and available publicly.
5. Monitor the workforce participation rate of people with intellectual disability to ensure that contract policies are having a positive impact on the very people the program is meant to benefit.
6. When service performance drops below satisfactory outcome benchmarks this should trigger the need for technical assistance. Technical assistance should be provided from within the profession (i.e. from above average performers) but funded by the Commonwealth.
 - 6.1. This offers the service sector a professional development model where skills and experience can be shared, younger workers guided by seasoned professionals, and the opportunity to build a comprehensive sector response to the needs of jobseekers with intellectual disability.
 - 6.2. We recommend that the Commonwealth replicate the successful model of technical assistance operated by the Virginia Commonwealth University to US employment professionals.
7. Continued poor performance over time, despite professional development, should trigger the need to look at alternative contract arrangements.

This set of solutions offers a framework guided by the achievement of outcomes and evidence based practices. They are solutions based on transparency which offer the community the opportunity to base decisions from an informed position. It is also a framework based on a model of professional development – where high achievers lead by sharing practices with others who are striving to either learn or improve.

We do not want to protect poor performers who repeatedly achieve poor outcomes – quite the contrary, however - a transparent and developmental approach is by far a better approach than a competitive tendering pathway, which may further hurt a small but essential specialist sector if we are to achieve the goals of social inclusion for school leavers with intellectual disability.

Endnote

¹ Jack Wade & Colin Bell. TOWARDS BEST PRACTICE. Report of the Open Employment Services Research Project 2001-03. November 2003