

Call for greater clarity

When it comes to Disability Employment Services data

Disability Employment Services (DES) has received significant criticism in the past few months and according to Nova Employment CEO Martin Wren, much is deserved.

He said issues with the DES performance measurement system (Star Ratings) makes it hard for service users to find accurate comparative information.

“People with disability who are matched to roles they enjoy, and are supported to meet employer expectations are more than capable of holding down work, other than token roles with minimum hours of work paid at minimum or supported wages,” he said.

Barriers to genuine participation

“Australia has many examples of world class disability employment programs, not that you would know it, as accurate comparative data is limited and hard to find.”

Data should include information PwD (People with Disability) might find useful for enabling empowerment and exercising genuine choice and control, he said. “Ask the DES agency you are considering questions such as: “For the last five job your agency has found what is the average hourly pay, the average hours worked each week and how long did those jobs last?”

“‘Choice and control’ is a noble slogan but to be meaningful, informed choice requires data and for DES that information is not readily available.”

Wren gave two examples:

Example A: “This is an employment services provider that targets people in receipt of the Disability Support Pension (DSP) and looks especially for business owners with a need for workers prepared to undertake repetitive, labour-intensive work.

“Their management staff are experts

in the details of the DES contract and instruct their staff to find as many minimum hour jobs as possible, while telling clients that accepting an eight hour a week job offer is “a step to future opportunities, a dollar in their pocket and something for a resume”.

Wren said there are presently no incentives to encourage DES providers to seek more hours of work beyond benchmark. Instead, there are disincentives to not look for work that could offer greater stability, skills development and less likelihood of dismissal.

“For this organisation, where profit is the central driving force and reduced costs rule, full time roles are frequently broken up to create numerous minimum hour jobs. Full time roles go from 1 x 38 hours to as many as five part time jobs (5 x 8 = 40 hours).

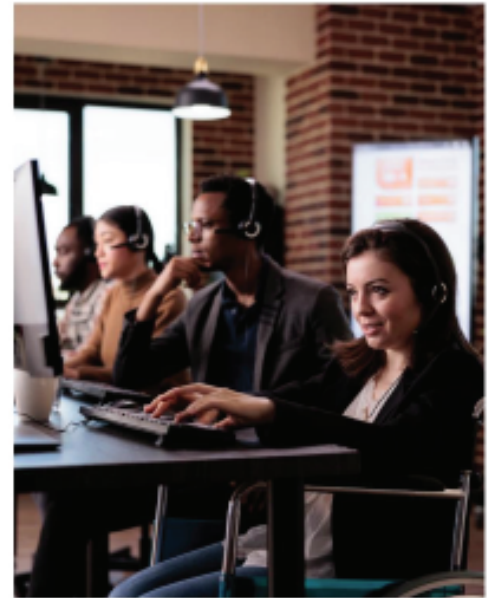
“This company knows so long as the worker achieves benchmark hours, outcome payments are the same, whether participants work eight hours or 38 hours payments, paid at 13, 26 and 52 weeks, that gives the organisation five times the income from outcome payments.

“Unfortunately, after six months employment, the employer lets their worker go, they aren’t missed because their minimum hour work never allowed them to become part of the team. At the same time another part-time worker replaces them for the next six months.

“Meanwhile, the use of the government subsidy covered 70 per cent of workers’ wages.

“Placing five jobseekers at minimum wage and minimum hours in 26 weeks this company received 5 X 13-week outcomes payment and 5 X 26-week outcomes and 5 X Star Ratings credit,” he said.

Example B: “This company prides itself on meeting the individual ability and



aspirations of their job seekers, all of whom they know by name. Finding the right job for Mary* was a real challenge but nevertheless it wasn’t too long before she was offered a part time role. The team persevered and Mary soon settled in, initially working four hours a day, three days a week and then five days a week.”

After three months her employer asked if she could enroll in a TAFE accounting course and six months later Mary received her first nationally recognised qualification, coupled with praise and a pay rise.

“Both organisations make a difference but, rather than empower PwD the system favors the provider that pursues small hour roles ensuring PwD remain on the fringes of inclusion.

“For what it’s worth, no change can occur unless services are required to provide meaningful performance data and power is moved from service providers, to PwD,” Wren said.

Data source: <https://data.gov.au/data/dataset/disability-employment-services-outcome-rates-by-disability-type>

*A pseudonym ●