Creating Futures

How employment services can be enhanced to better meet the needs of job seekers and employers

Consultation input
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A. Introduction

Established in 1992, the Australian Council for Private Education and Training (ACPET) is the national industry association for private providers of post-compulsory education and training. ACPET has over 1,100 members nationally delivering a full range of higher and vocational education and training (VET) and English language courses across all States and Territories.

ACPET’s mission is to enhance quality, choice, innovation and diversity in Australian education and training for individual, national and global development. It represents a range of private providers, including commercial and not-of-profit entities, community groups, and industry and enterprise-based organisations. ACPET works with governments, education and training providers, industries, and community organisations, to ensure vocational and higher education and training services are well-targeted, accessible, and well-delivered with courses of high quality, and providing for choice and diversity.

ACPET welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Department of Employment Education and Workforce Relations’ (DEEWR) request for a submission regarding the future of employment services within Job Services Australia (JSA) and Disability Employment Services (DES).

As the peak body for private providers, ACPET is committed to ensuring that its policies, products and service contribute to an inclusive tertiary education system and do not exclude or unfairly disadvantage learners or potential learners.

ACPET’s Code of Ethics requires all members to respond to the specific social, cultural and educational needs of all students. ACPET recently released its Statement of Social Inclusion and Diversity which provides further guidance to members and all those who work on ACPET’s behalf.

ACPET would like to acknowledge the efforts of the Australian Government in providing employment support for disadvantaged job seekers. This is an important and positive development direction.
B. Key Consultation Questions

Job Services Australia

1) How can JSA services for people who face multiple disadvantage be improved?

ACPET agrees that the current services:
- allow long term unemployed who are seeking a job to access broader and more flexible training and personal development options at the discretion of case workers – this is positive;
- allow for the support to the individual needs of job seekers to be tailored as required – this is beneficial for clients with complex layers of employment disadvantage.

ACPET expresses concern that increased funding allocations and JSA incentives for working with the long term unemployed may affect the support and resources available for the recently unemployed (refer to question 5).

ACPET suggests that consideration be given to the following issues, and recommends that JSA implement appropriate strategies:

- JSA should focus on long-term unemployed disadvantaged people and help them find employment as a priority;
- there should be JSA staff members (preferably Aboriginal) specifically trained to deal with Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders;
- clients strongly in favour of selecting their own JSA office
  Case study: clients assigned to a JSA office which is distant, “a bus and a train ride away” when there is another office “just around the corner”;
- concern is expressed that categories (1-4) mean that very little is done for unemployed until a person is in Category 4. Also concern that the tiered system is open to abuse
- cross cultural training is urgently required for all JSA Managers and staff
- JSA should not do be in the business of doing in-house training as there is a perceived conflict of interest if JSA are offering either accredited, non-accredited or ‘resume’ training that is charged against their own client allocations
  Case study quoted 25 people doing a five day ‘How to write a resume’ course at $350 per person.
- JSA offices need to have ease of access, wheelchair access and customer toilets
2) How can better links between vocational education and training providers, employment services and employers be developed?

- One of the aims of JSA is to create good links between employment services and VET providers. These links need further work, and need to be strengthened. Concern has been expressed that staff of JSA lack expertise and understanding of the VET training system, and are unaware of the wide range of training options available to the jobseekers. Therefore jobseekers are not appropriately advised about options for retraining and upskilling.

- As the peak body for private training providers, ACPET is well positioned to hold a series of forums aimed at briefing JSA staff about the VET market, in particular the range and diversity of providers and courses, and the training subsidy arrangements that exist. This would ensure that JSA staff are fully aware of the opportunities available for their clients in small to medium sized RTOs. Many small and medium sized RTOs pride themself on the and effective support that they provide for their clients.

- There is an obvious need for better linkages with JSA/RTOs and the local business community.

- JSA need to be more open about training opportunities. Training in-house is perceived as a conflict of interest (refer to question1)

- cross cultural training is urgently required for all JSA Managers and staff

- specifically trained JSA staff members (aboriginal) would deal with Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders, linking all parties.

- Improved communication channels between vocational education and training providers, employment services and employers.

3) How might the JSA model encourage and support providers to better address the needs of employers, including employers in the private sector, those operating nationally and those in growth industries?

Employers often advise ACPET members that they are frustrated by being constantly approached individually by JSAs, VET providers, schools and various other organisations for placements, work experience, jobs etc.

ACPET recommends a more coordinated approach to working with employers, possibly to be led by DEEWR or by ACPET on behalf of its members with the funding support of DEEWR.

A coordinated approach that ensures all RTOs have equal access to information regarding employment and training opportunities therefore providing students with the best opportunity to be matched in an appropriate working environment.
ACPET members also indicate that the employment services model of the JSAs needs to be more closely aligned with the employers’ needs so as to support employers beyond financial incentives. Employers require more than financial incentives, such as pre- and post-placement support, and an awareness of not just technical skills but also character, career and workplace readiness skills.

ACPET recommends cross cultural training for all JSA Managers and staff.

4) How can JSA play a greater role in increasing mature age employment and participation?

More awareness needs to be created regarding the issue of underemployment of mature aged jobseekers, and the benefits that mature aged workers bring to the workforce, so as to encourage employers to employing them.

ACPET would be pleased to collaborate with DEEWR in order to deliver this message to the community.

Emphasis also needs to be given to retraining opportunities for mature aged persons.

ACPET recommends that more funding needs to be directed to mature age training.

5) How can services for recently unemployed people be improved?

ACPET members indicate that:
- The current funding model does not provide enough incentives for JSAs to support the recently unemployed. The model needs to be more effective in better supporting those recently unemployed in re-entering the employment market as quickly as possible. Due to the length of time that this is currently taking, the jobseeker’s skills, training and employment history can become outdated and irrelevant to prospective employers, coupled with the compromising of job seekers’ confidence, social inclusion and mental health.
- Increased services for newly arrived migrants and their families to ensure that they are supported whilst settling in Australia. These services should include overseas qualification recognition and experiences within the first 6 months of settlement.

ACPET members would welcome a more even distribution of incentives for JSA providers in order to work more effectively with the recently unemployed.

6) What steps can be taken to further strengthen the performance of JSA providers?

ACPET suggests more consistent professional development requirements for JSA case workers, front desk employees, and other relevant staff. For example, a benchmark for all case worker qualifications, in addition to ongoing regular customer service and professional training, would markedly improve the quality of service delivered to job seekers.
ACPET also suggests that cross cultural training, and a program of training in working with interpreters should be a mandatory requirement for JSA case workers and other staff, given the high numbers of job seekers from CALD backgrounds.

ACPET recommends suitable training courses such as the Certificate III and IV in Employment Services could be considered as the minimum qualification level.

7) **How can JSA be further improved to help meet the Government's commitment to close the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians by 2018?**

ACPET members who work with the **CALD client group** (which also includes skilled migrants), have suggested that the implementation of CALD employment targets within mainstream KPIs and the introduction of a Best Standard of Service Provision for CALD clients would help in better servicing this group. Case workers need to be flexible and be able to reassess clients from a CALD background, who have multiple employment barriers, so as to ensure that they have the opportunity to access more intensive training as well as additional individualised support, when and if required. Individualised support may take the form of

JSAs could offer job brokering support, where CALD clients are given extra support to apply for positions which best match their technical skills and their career goals.

Relevant education and regular professional development of case workers would help them to increase their capacity to work across cultures: this would be of great benefit to CALD clients.

Increased incentives and resources for JSA providers to appropriately support CALD clients enter the workforce are also urgently required.

8) **What changes to employment services in remote areas would better deliver employment outcomes and meaningful participation activities?**

ACPET recommends that more infrastructure be provided in remote areas to meet specific local needs.
Disability Employment Services

9) What policy refinements are required to ensure services remain focussed on assisting job seekers with disability gain and keep ongoing and sustainable employment?

The DES website specifically discusses the needs of people with a moderate intellectual disability. Attention must also be specifically directed to the training and workplace needs of people with sensory disabilities such as people who are deaf, blind or dyslexic. People with these disabilities even the very well educated and qualified are significantly under-employed. The anecdotal evidence of deaf people and blind people with substantial tertiary education qualifications trapped in low paying and unsatisfying work should be of concern for the government and wider community.

Secondly, it is important to be mindful that people with disabilities do not always feel comfortable ‘declaring’ their disabilities at the various points of entry into education, training and employment. Similarly, people with disabilities do not always want to go to ‘specialist’ disability services, feeling that such services continue to be patronizing and limited in their expectations of what people with disabilities can achieve.

Thirdly, it is useful to be mindful that people who are born with a disability have different education, training and employment expectations and experiences from those people who acquire a disability later in life, either through illness or trauma such as road accidents. Most people who acquire a disability expect to be retrained or to return to work as a personal right and entitlement; in contrast, many, and perhaps even most, people who are born with a disability experience so much early life-long discrimination, hardship and difficulty that they feel cowed before they even start their journey to full and satisfying employment. This means that efforts and initiatives to shape expectations and possibilities must start as early as prep school and continue all the way through primary, middle and secondary school. Too often, there is a scramble in the upper secondary school years to sort out the disabled students’ post-school options.

Finally, greater attention needs to be directed towards inclusive language in government policy announcements: too often, new initiatives are silent on the needs of, and possibilities for, people with a disability (and people who are deaf or who are blind are pretty well invisible in government literature: most references to people with a disability are supported by images of wheelchairs or by selective ‘diagnostic’ descriptions pertaining to people with a moderate disability).

10) What purchasing process is the most appropriate vehicle to improve the access of job seekers with disability and employers to high performing DES providers?

Private registered training organizations (RTOs) and private employers need to be given a freer hand in buying the services, products and supports that their students and trainees require. Too often, the complex red tape and time delays involved in purchasing mean that
the required services are either too late in arriving to be of any use to the student/trainee/employee or the RTO/employer simply gives up on the application process.

ACPET recommends that a direct payment and purchasing process be adopted by DES. Clients are often required to purchase their own equipment/needs, then claim back for them. This is inconvenient and adds to the administration load/paperwork of DES.

National registers and accreditation services also need to be established in a range of services, for example, in note-taking services:

**Note-taking Services**

“The provision of notetaking services is crucial for most deaf and hard of hearing students at the post-secondary level in classes designed for students with normal hearing. Collectively, more deaf and hard of hearing students in mainstreamed postsecondary settings use notetaking services than any other available support service. It has been said that having an interpreter guarantees equal access to the classroom, but having a notetaker guarantees equal access to the information from the class. Like tutors and the use of assistive listening devices in the classroom, each serves its own useful function: they are not redundant. [. . .] A deaf or hard of hearing student must get information by looking at a speaker or an interpreter and will probably find writing notes at the same time difficult.’ (Source: *Notetaking for deaf and hard of hearing students*: an article by Donald Hastings, Kim Brecklin, Sandy Cermak, Rondalyn Reynolds, Harlene Rosen and Jimmie Wilson).

Note-taking services are not as well organized in Australia as they are elsewhere, for example, in the United Kingdom where an Association of Note-taking Professionals (See: [http://www.anpnotetakers.co.uk/](http://www.anpnotetakers.co.uk/)) has been established to represent Electronic and Manual Notetakers who work with deaf and disabled people in professional, community and academic settings throughout the UK. This professional association aims to promote notetaking and its good practice and support the development of notetaking as a communication and support service.

The Commonwealth Government has a significant and useful role to play in bolstering the provision and availability of such services, either directly or through increased subsidies. Basically, there are two types of note-taking services:

1. Electronic note-taking (or real time captioning)

**An Electronic Notetaker** is a language service professional who works with people who are unable to fully access the spoken word, and generally suits those who are deaf, deafblind, dyslexic and/or unable to take their own notes or who need the transfer of the spoken word to text or Braille. A summary of the speech (or verbatim of the speech is slow), is done using equipment provided by the ENT – usually one or two laptop computers with dedicated software. The ENT types what is heard so that you can read it from the ‘receiver’ laptop in real time, read from a big projector screen, or transfer the notes later to your own computer to adapt as you wish.

**While this service is available in Australia (known as CART, i.e. Captioning and Real Time Translation), it is an expensive service and one for which employers appear to be either reluctant to seek funds, or simply do not know about.**
The Website of the Shorthand Reporters Association of Australia (SRAA) lists those of its members that offer CART services around Australia (Job Accommodation Network 2008; Shorthand Reporters Association of Australia 2008.

**Manual Notetakers** take notes for deaf or disabled people in a wide range of situations. Their clients include but are not limited to, people with visual or hearing impairments, dyslexia or mobility problems. Notetakers are trained to take a clear set of notes in handwritten English for the client to read later. One advantage of manual notetaking over electronic is that annotations of handouts, diagrams and equations can be easily added to the written notes. Manual Notetakers work in a variety of settings where the client may wish to have a comprehensive set of notes to refer to in the moment or at a later date, such as workplace appraisals, training, staff meetings and conferences.

11) How can DES be further improved to help meet the Government’s commitment to close the gap in employment outcomes for Indigenous Australians by 2018?

ACPET recommends that additional funding be provided for direct support aimed at Indigenous Australians.