# National Disability Services Ticket to Work Submission to the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005

## About National Disability Services

National Disability Services (NDS) is the peak industry body for non-government disability services. It represents service providers across Australia in their work to deliver high-quality supports and life opportunities for people with disability. NDS’s Australia-wide membership includes over 1,180 non-government organisations, which support people with all forms of disability. The members collectively provide the full range of disability services - from accommodation support, respite and therapy to community access and employment. NDS provides information and networking opportunities to its members and policy advice to State, Territory and Federal governments.

## Introduction

NDS welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the 2020 Review of the Disability Standards for Education 2005. Ticket to Work is a national initiative of National Disability Services (NDS) focusing on improving school to work pathways for young people with significant disability as defined by the Department of Social Services (2020). Consequently, this submission will focus upon the experience of assisting students with disability to transition from secondary school to open employment through early exposure to employment.

Research shows that in Australia young people with disability are not transitioning successfully from school into further training or employment; a factor that is an indicator of long term, and often life-long, disadvantage. Young people with disability are more likely to drop out of school early, be excluded from the labour force, have fewer educational qualifications, experience poverty and be socially isolated. (Wakeford Waugh 2019)It is imperative that these trends are reversed: The findings of research by Siperstein, Parker and Drascher (2013) indicate if young people with significant disability do not engage in mainstream employment by age 21, it is unlikely that they ever will.

What happens in school is key to the long term economic and social participation of people with disability. Early intervention and career development makes a difference. Deloitte Access Economics (2018) identified that it is ‘crucial that young people with disability receive the support required to participate in the workforce as early as possible to drive effective long-term employment and maximise the benefits of improved standards of living and social inclusion that come with employment’.

Australian students with disability often face a pervasive culture of low expectations resulting in a lack of opportunities for genuine sustainable employment. Prolonged exposure to ‘horizon-limiting views and experiences’ may see these beliefs become internalised and the young person’s capacity to recognise their potential diminishes (PricewaterhouseCoopers Australia, 2011). Along with the risk that the young person is not able to identify their potential, parents can also lose the ability to see their child’s potential and, consequently, cannot support them to achieve their goals. Expectations of parents are critical in the success of transition from school to work for young people with disability (Carter, Austin, & Trainor, 2012; Gilson, Carter, Bumble, & McMillan, 2018). According to the Executive Summary of Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2012) ”a poor education is one of the key reasons why the economic and social participation rate of people with disabilities is so low.’

All young people, at the age of 14 should begin to receive an ‘employment first’ approach to their education, regardless of disability. An ‘employment first’ approach is the preeminent vocational disability practice in many overseas countries (Blamires, 2015; Monteleone, 2016). This approach is directed at the transition from school stage, whereby “employment is the first and preferred option when exploring goals and a life path for citizens with disabilities” and “young people with disabilities have work experiences that are typical of other teenagers and young adults (APSE Executive Board, 2010)”.

Participation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) is an effective means of ensuring young people with disability have a pathway to employment. Amongst the key findings of Polidano and Mavromaras (2010), VET completion significantly improves the likelihood of people with disability both obtaining and retaining employment. These authors claim unemployed people with disability increase their likelihood of obtaining employment from 9% to 29% upon completion of a VET Certificate III level or above course.

Work based learning encompassing both formal qualifications and work experience is a beneficial strategy for people with disability to gain access to employment (Lewis, Thoresen, & Cocks, 2011a, 2011b). A three year longitudinal study undertaken by Thoresen, Cocks, and Parsons (2019) demonstrates substantial benefits of VET traineeships and apprenticeships.

Despite these clear benefits from participation in VET, people with disability have low rates of participation, only 4% in 2008 (McVicar & Tabasso, 2016). Cavallaro, Foley, Saunders, and Bowman (2005) found this cohort of students are more likely to undertake Cert I or II level courses and not go on to the higher qualifications that are more likely to lead to employment outcomes (Karmel, 2019).

The measurement of completion rates is complex and are dependant upon a range of variables that include the type of disability which intersect with other variables such as low socioeconomic status (McVicar & Tabasso, 2016). Karmel (2019) indicates the overall data shows low completion rates and questionable employment outcomes for those completing these courses, including students with disability.

McVicar and Tabasso (2016) highlight two gaps for disadvantaged students, including those with disability. The first is the VET completion gap and the second is in labour market outcomes. They identify completion rates in VET are low but are even lower for disadvantaged students. In a summary of McVicar and Tabasso’s findings, Buddelmeyer and Polidano (2016) argue the completion gap between disadvantaged and non-disadvantaged students only explain a very small part of the post-training employment differences. Instead these gaps are better explained by student characteristics, particularly the lower engagement in work prior to study by disadvantaged students. Therefore, improving the completion rates for students alone won’t improve labour market outcomes. Instead early intervention and career guidance prior to VET participation, ideally during secondary schooling may reduce completion and employment gaps.

### Focus of Ticket to Work.

Ticket to Work was established in response to poor and falling school to work transition rates for young Australians with disability. Unsuccessful transition from school holds lifelong economic and social implications for the individual, their families and society.

While not underestimating the challenges, Ticket to Work has demonstrated in significant numbers that young people can thrive in open employment when prepared and supported while at school through a coordinated approach. Ticket to Work ensures effective pathways from school into open employment, or further education and training. The model was developed by scoping ‘what works’ in other countries. That is:

Connecting a student with disability to the world of work before they leave school through a coordinated approach greatly improves the likelihood of securing ongoing open employment and creates better economic and social outcomes.

Ticket to Work’s connected approach consists of 34 local networks; 205 schools; 145 local organisations and has delivered 1,621 jobs for young people mainly with significant disability.

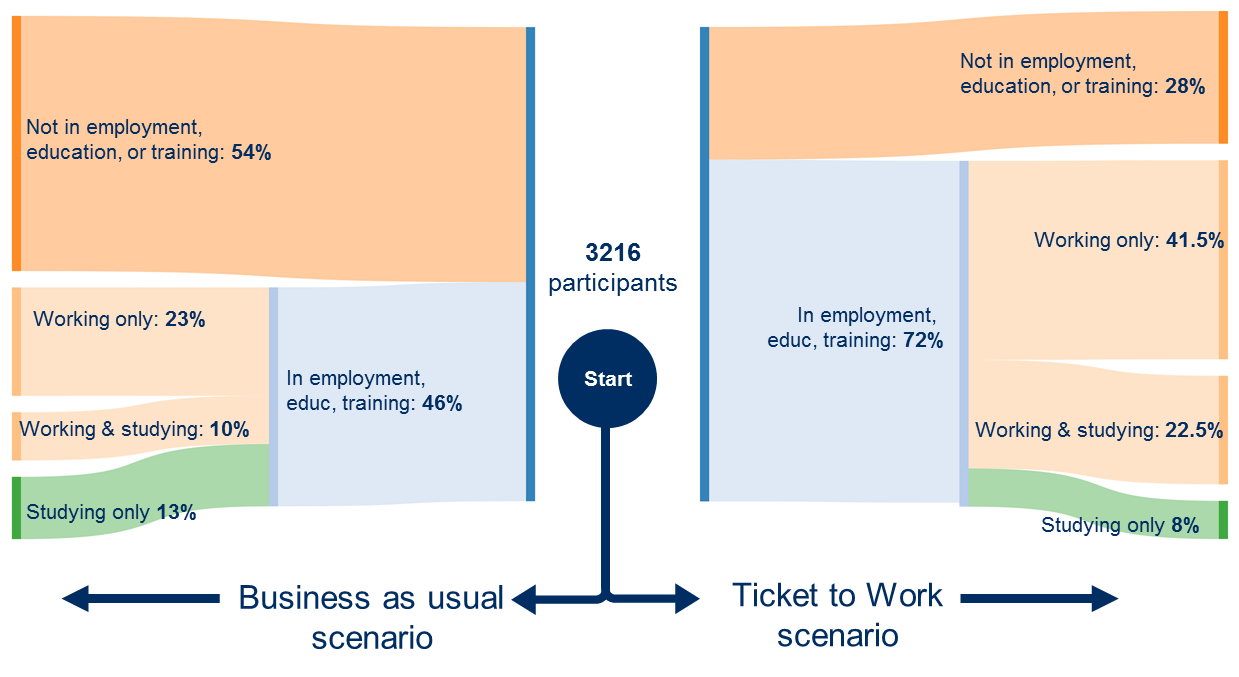
Empirical research is the basis of the Ticket to Work model.

National Disability Services has collaborated with researchers and evaluators and has developed a large body of work regarding effective school to work transitions for young people with disability.

Recent evaluations on the elements of the Ticket to Work model have shown:

* The Ticket to Work model has many social and economic benefits (Atkinson, 2019).
* Post-school Ticket to Work participants are substantially more likely than a similar comparison group to:
  + work in open employment
  + complete year 12
  + participate in the labour force
  + be involved in the community and socially active (Atkinson, 2019)
* Ticket to Work’s approach is working for critical stakeholders (evaluation of employers, parents and network members) and is in line with international good practice and research (Atkinson, 2019; Kellock, 2020; Wakeford, 2020).
* There is a need to focus on how to get different sectors working in concert to improve employment outcomes and raises expectations (Meadows, 2019)
* Ticket to Work supports effective integration of mainstream and disability supports and reduces duplication (Atkinson, 2019)

**Employment, education and training outcomes post school**



*Figure indicates finding of a comparison study. Ticket to Work participants showed improved employment outcomes compared to young people that did not have Ticket to Work support (Business as usual) ARTD 2019 and SVA 2020*

Ticket to Work participants with opportunities to participate in work and career development activities at school showed improved employment, education and training outcomes compared to young people that did not have Ticket to Work support (the business as usual scenario).

**Characteristics of the Ticket to Work Model**

Ticket to Work prepares young people for the world of work, providing them with an open employment pathway in their transition from school through a combination of vocational/career development and early contact with work environments.

Community networks are developed and leverage the power of cross-sectoral partnerships to provide individualised support, blending existing resources, coordinating and scaffolding all relevant supports for young people with significant disability.

The networks are coordinated by an intermediary, which supports the development of a local community partnership, including schools, employment services, training organisations, post school providers and employers.

Ticket to Work:

* brings together disability-specific and mainstream representatives from a variety of sectors to work strategically and collaboratively
* supports young people to gain access to early experiences that positively influence their views of themselves as workers
* prepares young people with disability for the workplace and gives them an employment pathway that is typical of other young adults
* meets the needs of employers, providing enhanced retention and profitability.

### Interaction between sectors: The significance of collaboration

Ticket to Work demonstrates the significance of interaction and collaboration between education funded by state governments; disability supports through the NDIS and employment services funded by the Commonwealth. Programs are often ‘siloed’, in either schools or adult disability services, training or employment services, creating a dichotomous model whose division of service delivery is reflective of traditional funding arrangements by governments (Winn & Hay, 2009).

Young people with disability need to have access to supports enabling them to transition effectively from school into employment. Just as the impact of disability impacts upon individuals on a continuum, there needs to be a continuum of service responses to address the barriers individuals face. Post-school services need to connect with individuals while at school, with the initiation of career development and pre-employment skills training commencing before school-leaving age (Kruger, Elinson, & Milfort, 2006).

Interventions should include preventive and collaborative approaches that address the multiple causes of exclusion (Dyson, 2005).

Collaboration between schools and agencies preparing people with disability for the world of Work is a critical component in creating employment opportunities. Kohler (1993) identified interagency cooperation and collaboration as one of the most frequently cited “best practices” for transition planning and included it as one of five key practice areas in her seminal work, the Taxonomy for Transition Programming The Taxonomy for Transition Programming 2.0 (Kohler & Gothberg, 2016).

Exploration, preparation and implementation for employment pathways needs to occur while students are still attending school, and there needs to be collaboration between key stakeholders. These include mainstream post-school services with expertise in vocational training, apprenticeships and the provision of work experience, along with disability specific services with experience in teaching employment skills, school staff, families and the students.

In the US it is acknowledged that:

Neither schools, nor workforce investment programs, human service agencies, or any other single system alone can pay for and provide the array of services needed to effectively meet the often complex needs of youth with disabilities. When collectively pooled, however, these resources can produce positive outcomes for youth, well beyond the scope of what any single system can hope to mobilise on its own (National Governors’ Association Center for Best Practice, 2004).

Also, in the US, collaboration is mandatory, and transition services/career decision-making take place in partnership with the post school supports.

In Australia, there is a need to support collaboration, as in the Ticket to Work model to ensure sectors and systems work together to improve career development and school to work transition of young people with disability. Efforts to do so have been the mainstay of recommendations of multiple Australian government inquires and agreements, and yet it remains unaddressed (Children with Disability Australia, 2015).

The Ticket to Work model promotes the development of community networks which leverage the power of cross-sectoral partnerships to provide individualised support, blending existing resources, coordinating, and the scaffolding of all relevant supports for young people with significant disability. These networks are coordinated by an intermediary organisation, which supports the development of local community partnerships, that includes schools, employment services, training organisations, post school providers and employers. It is essential these intermediary organisations are funded to coordinate the collaboration between these stakeholders.

According to the Disability Standards,

6.3 Measures for compliance with standards

Measures that the education provider may implement to enable the student to participate in the learning experiences (including the assessment and certification requirements) of the course or program, and any relevant supplementary course or program, on the same basis as a student without a disability, include measures ensuring that:

(e) any activities that are not conducted in a classroom, such as field trips, industry site visits and work placements, or activities that are part of the broader course or educational program of which the course or program is a part, are designed to include the student;

Currently the requirements of education providers related to career development are not explicitly set out in the Standards. Consequently, students with complex needs are being excluded from work related activities such as work experience while at school. School and other organisations state that students are excluded because their support needs are over and above what education providers are reasonably expected to provide according to the Disability Standards.

The Disability Standards need to ensure all students, regardless of their level of disability, are supported to participate in work experience when they have a desire to do so. A clear explanation of reasonable adjustment relating to career development ensure all students with disability are appropriately supported to participate in these activities. With work experience at school being the number one indicator of post school employment no matter the nature of the disability, we believe that it should be explicit in the standards (Sheppard, Harrington, & Howard, 2017).

It is essential that the Education Standards ensure all students with disability who have a desire to participate in career development activities have the support needed to do so.

## Conclusion

Ticket to Work demonstrates young people can succeed in open employment when prepared and supported while at school through a coordinated approach based upon empirical evidence. Career development and pre-employment skills training need to begin before school-leaving age (Kruger et al., 2006). Collaboration between parents, staff from schools and disability and employment services together with employers, is essential to ensuring this occurs. The Disability Standards for Education need to ensure all students have access to the support they require to undertake career development and work experience while at school. Thank you for your consideration of this submission. For further information on any issues raised, please get in touch.

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### Ticket to Work evidence

We have commissioned and conducted a significant amount of research/evaluation evidenced based school to work transition for young people with disability.

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