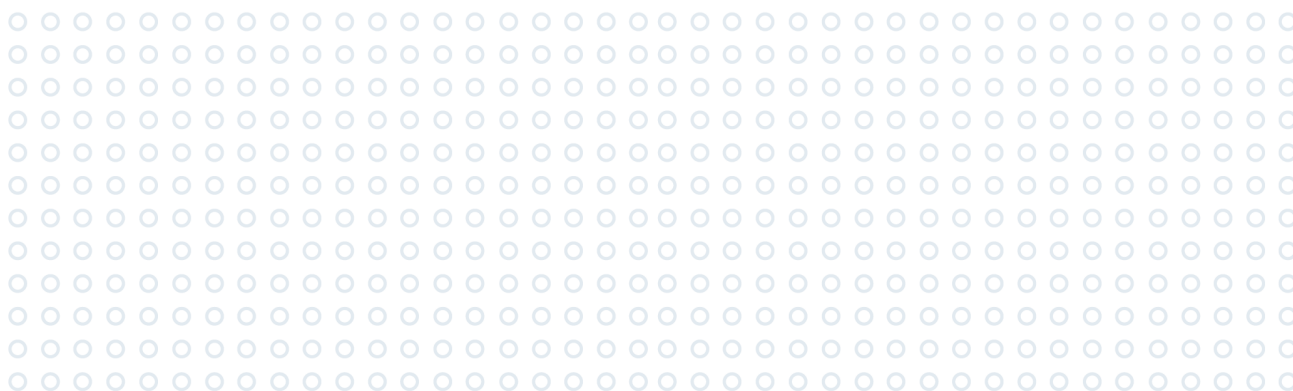


Business
Council of
Australia



Submission to the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations on Improving the Employment Participation of People with Disability in Australia

FEBRUARY 2013

*Working to achieve
economic, social
and environmental
goals that will benefit
Australians now and
into the future*

About this submission

The Business Council of Australia (BCA) brings together the chief executives of more than 100 of Australia's leading companies, whose vision is for Australia to be the best place in the world in which to live, learn, work and do business.

The BCA is pleased to have the opportunity to provide input on the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR) discussion paper on *Improving the Employment Participation of People with Disability in Australia*.

In this submission:

- ▶ The BCA strongly supports the aim of increasing the employment of Australians with disability.
- ▶ The BCA does not support requiring employers to report on disability employment, because it would fail to increase the employment of people with disability while imposing unnecessary costs.

The BCA considers that the best way of increasing the employment of people with disability is by:

- ▶ Improving incentives in Australia's employment services so pre- and post-employment support and training for jobseekers with disability are more tailored and coordinated to long-term jobs that match their capabilities.
- ▶ Reviewing contractual arrangements in the current DEEWR review of employment services to strengthen incentives to match long-term jobs with people with disability.
- ▶ Informing employers of the benefits and best practice arrangements for employing people with disability.
- ▶ Reducing complexities in Australia's welfare and taxation system where it discourages some people with disability from seeking work because of the fear of losing benefits.

Introduction

The Business Council of Australia is pleased to have the opportunity to provide input on the discussion paper on *Improving the Employment Participation of People with Disability in Australia*, which seeks comments on:

- how to improve employment outcomes and workplace equality for people with disability
- whether requiring employers to report on disability employment would increase the employment of people with disability.

Improving the employment outcomes of people with disability

The BCA has been highly supportive of effective workplace initiatives that aim to remove barriers to workforce and community participation for people with disability. We are pleased that the discussion paper acknowledges evidence of the benefits to individuals and the overall economy of greater economic and social participation of people with disability. In particular:

- employees with disability are as productive, if not more productive, than other employees, and have a positive impact on staff morale
- employment enables people with a disability to exercise more choice and control over their lives, improving their overall economic and social wellbeing
- as the share of people with a disability who are employed increases, national income also rises.

The available data reveal several potential barriers to employing people with disability. After their own disability, Australians with disability reported that the most common reason for not finding work was lack of skills or education (ABS, 2009). For people who assessed their health as poor, the most commonly reported incentives to enable work included being able to maintain welfare benefits, less paperwork from government agencies and 'being able to sit down' (ABS, 2012). The last reason suggests that physical adjustments in the work environment can address many employment barriers faced by people with disability.

In 2011 the Productivity Commission found that the complexity of the tax/transfer system was likely to be a disincentive for people with disability seeking work because beneficiaries are fearful of losing benefits.

The BCA is working collaboratively with the Australian Council of Social Service (ACOSS) and the Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU) to improve employment opportunities for people who are disadvantaged in the labour market, including people with disability, and giving employers access to workers who meet their skill needs. At an expert roundtable held in December 2012, opportunities for employers and government to better support 'demand-led' employment for disadvantaged jobseekers were discussed.

Some people with disability who are willing and able to work may need additional skills to fill available jobs. The discussion paper refers to government programs such as JobAccess and the National Disability Recruitment Coordinator and considers that their impact on increasing the total employment of people with disability has been limited to date. Further work to identify improvements to these programs should be a priority.

The ACOSS/ACTU/BCA expert roundtable, which included representatives of companies that actively seek to employ disadvantaged jobseekers and employment services that seek to place them in jobs, suggests streamlining and better coordinating government support and more strongly linking training with actual jobs. The current DEEWR review of Australia's employment services should consider how best to adjust its incentives, such as its contractual arrangements, so training and post-employment support are tailored to better help disadvantaged jobseekers secure a position that matches their capabilities.

The importance of better matching jobseekers with jobs was highlighted to reduce the risk of setting jobseekers up for failure, as well as reducing the risk of increasing employer recruitment and training costs.

More information on this work can be found on the BCA website at www.bca.com.au.

Supporting people with disability in employment

To increase the employment of people with disability who are willing and able to work, it is useful to learn from employers who are already successfully employing people with disability. This includes initiatives undertaken by several BCA member companies. Examples of successful initiatives include:

- Westpac's Accessibility Action Plan, which builds on an audit undertaken of Westpac's recruitment function by the Australian Network on Disability. The audit led to a review of Westpac's recruitment processes and tools to increase the accessibility of Westpac's vacancies to a wider talent pool. Westpac is also working with the Australian Network on Disability to provide internships for university students with disability. Westpac also supports more flexible working arrangements to increase the retention, as well as recruitment, of people with disability.
- ANZ's Disability Action Plan, which aims to have customer services and workplaces that are accessible to people with disability and to actively employ people with disability. To achieve this, ANZ seeks to ensure that all ANZ services and products take account of individuals who may be affected by visual, auditory, physical, speech, cognitive and neurological disabilities. ANZ has established a Technology Accessibility Helpline to resolve technology accessibility issues, and also runs other initiatives to support employees and customers with disability.
- Woolworths Limited has a partnership with WorkFocus Australia to encourage people with disability to apply for jobs at Woolworths. Woolworths understands the need to help managers and other staff when recruiting and employing people with disability. For this reason, Woolworths has published a 'How to Guide' that contains practical advice for their staff when recruiting and working with employees with disability, and information on resources available to support the ongoing employment of people with disability. Equipment can be adjusted and tailored to the specific needs of employees with disability, and jobs can be designed around their specific skills and capacities.

To realise the benefits of employing people with disability, it is important to understand the challenges they can face in a work environment and the range of adjustments that are able to be made to enable their ongoing, successful employment. Educating workplaces about the benefits of employing people with disability, and adjusting workplaces to provide an environment to safely accommodate people with disability, may require additional resources, at least initially.

The abovementioned examples from BCA member companies point to several ways companies can employ more people with certain labour market disadvantages, such as disability, including:

- understanding the type of initiatives that would benefit both employees and the company, such as ANZ's awareness of the potential benefits of a Technology Accessibility Helpline for customers as well as employees. In other words, developing a business case for these initiatives.
- identifying current business processes and infrastructure that unintentionally create barriers, as Westpac did with an audit of recruitment processes
- developing partnerships with other organisations, such as Woolworth's partnership with WorkFocus Australia to operate recruitment services.

Diversity Council Australia actively disseminates best practice examples of how to meet the challenges of employing people with disability. Encouraging more workplaces to use this knowledge would help increase the employment of Australians with disability.

Unnecessary business reporting

The available data already shows us there is potential for more Australians with disability to be employed. More reporting by employers will not reduce the specific barriers to employment of people with disability identified above, and will increase business administrative costs.

The discussion paper itself acknowledges the difficulty of obtaining reliable data from employers on their employment of people with disability because employee disability is often under-reported due to privacy concerns or a fear of discrimination. This is also affected by the stigma of mental illness or a psychological disability. It is also due to the reasonable desire of individuals to not disclose certain information.

The BCA is highly supportive of efforts to lift the participation of people with disability and our member companies are engaged in a range of innovative initiatives to support this. We understand that given the wide range of disabilities and work environments, the capacity of employers to adapt their work environments will vary. For this reason, reporting is a blunt and costly approach that will fail to increase the level of employment for people with disability.

As it is in the interests of companies to be good corporate citizens, a more effective approach will be to provide employers with a variety of examples of how different workplaces have benefited from either employing people with disability, or procuring from organisations that support the employment of people with disability. This would be a more effective way of increasing their employment and achieving the associated social and economic benefits.

Recommendations

- ▶ The BCA strongly supports the aim of increasing the employment of Australians with disability.
- ▶ The BCA does not support requiring employers to report on disability employment, because it would fail to increase the employment of people with disability while imposing unnecessary costs.

The BCA considers that the best way of increasing the employment of people with disability is by:

- ▶ Improving incentives in Australia's employment services system so pre- and post-employment support and training for jobseekers with disability are more tailored and coordinated to long-term jobs that match their capabilities.
- ▶ Reviewing contractual arrangements in the current DEEWR review of employment services to strengthen incentives to match long-term jobs with people with disability.
- ▶ Informing employers of the benefits and best practice arrangements for employing people with disability.
- ▶ Reducing complexities in Australia's welfare and taxation system where it discourages some people with disability from seeking work because of the fear of losing benefits.

References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics), 2012, *Australian Social Trends*, cat. no. 4102.0.

ABS, 2010, *Disability, Ageing and Carers, Australia: Summary of Findings, 2009*, cat. no. 4430.0.

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