

Employment Services Purchasing
Department of Education, Skills and Training
Sent via email: <mailto:espurchasing@dese.gov.au>

23 June 2021

Re: Transition to Work

Amaze works to create positive change for autistic people

Amaze is a community organisation established over fifty years ago by autistic people and their families. We work to build community understanding of autism, influence policy change for autistic people and provide independent, credible information and resources to individuals, families, professionals, government and the wider community. We are closely connected with the autistic community through our national help line Autism Connect, our peer support networks and community capacity building initiatives.

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the redesign of Transition to Work, noting that short timelines have enable abbreviated input only. We attached our more comprehensive submissions on the related topics of the [National Disability Employment Strategy](#) and [TAFE and Autism](#).

Autistic young people have huge untapped talent and potential

Autistic people want to work, and they have capabilities and interests relevant to all types of jobs. Despite this, autistic people have long endured among the worst education, training and employment outcomes in Australia – much worse than people with disability more generally.

The high prevalence of autism (around 3% of the population); the very poor education and employment outcomes for this group; and the huge untapped talent and skills of autistic young people create the imperative for action.

Transition to Work could play an important part in enabling autistic young people

Current support for young autistic people navigating the study to work transition – including the School Leavers Employment Support program (for NDIS participants), Disability Employment Services and JobActive - is not working well. Approaches are typically characterized by low aspiration, are not appropriate for this life transition, and are poorly linked with local supports and industry.

The next iteration of the Transition to Work program provides a significant opportunity to shift the dial on employment and life outcomes for Australia's sizeable population of autistic young people.

We welcome the intention to make TtW available to more young people experiencing labour market disadvantage, including young people with disability. We urge that this be taken a step further, so that **TtW is the default employment support program for all young autistic jobseekers** (unless they elect to go into JobActive or DES).

There are strong reasons for this:

- Including autistic young people in mainstream service provision will reduce the risk of them being further marginalised and streamed into segregated work settings (e.g. ADEs)
- The TtW model is purpose build for young people – DES has no such equivalent
- TtW provides significantly enhanced opportunities for vocational exploration and work experience – something young autistic people (many of whom leave school early) have often done little or none of at school
- TtW starts with young people’s goals and aspirations – the strengths-based approach is conspicuously absent elsewhere
- The place-based approach of TtW (one provider per region) enables stronger links into local industry and employers; the creation of regional training/work pathways; NDIA partners and community supports. This is not the case with DES and JobActive providers, whose multiple-provider areas dilutes relationships with key stakeholders.
- Community of practice approaches to share learnings about what works are enabled in the TtW model. Sharing of approaches and building a national evidence base about what work in supporting young autistic people into work is needed.
- Young people can access TtW without being on income support (changes to DES criteria exclude those not on Centrelink payments from accessing services)

Making TtW the default employment service for young autistic people would require providers to be autism proficient and for practices and processes to be embedded in the model that enable autistic young people to thrive.

- Bidders ought to demonstrate how they will develop and maintain autism proficiency
- Evidence-based autism specific tools and approaches could form a critical part of the service offering. For example:
 - [The MyWay Employability App](#) – a free app for autistic young people (aged 14-30 years) which covers careers exploration matched to strengths and interests, career planning, further education and employment pathways. This has been developed by Autism CRC.
 - The [Integrated Employment Success Tool \(IEST\)](#) Autism Employment Tool – an evidence-based and comprehensive tool which supports end-to-end recruitment processes for the recruitment, on-boarding and retention of autistic people.
 - Key elements of the [Ticket to Work program](#), which has been effective with autistic young people, could be embedded in the approach

Please feel welcome to contact Nicole Rees (Amaze Deputy CEO and Executive Manager, Policy and Advocacy) at [REDACTED] to discuss this submission.

