



**Australian Government**

**Department of Education, Employment  
and Workplace Relations**

# **National Workforce Project** *Literature Review*

## **National Disability Services**

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# 1. Introduction

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## 1.1. *Topic and Context*

Population ageing, and the associated impacts on the availability of workers in Australia and many OECD countries, is of major interest to academics and policy makers alike (OECD, 2003; PIU, 2001; NCOSS, 2007). This is exacerbated by skill shortages in many industries caused by continuing technological change, slow adjustments to the changing labour market, mismatch between the skills acquired by workers and the skills required by employers, insufficient labour mobility, and other institutional or demographic factors, such as lower female participation rates (OECD, 2003).

These labour shortages impact upon the disability services workforce within Australia, most notably due to the ageing and female dominant profile of the workforce. Much of the disability services workforce is rapidly approaching retiring age (NDA/KPMG, 2006; NDS, 2007), and this is exacerbated by the high proportion of women (NDA/KPMG, 2006) within the workforce. According to the ABS, in the 2006-2007 period the average age of retirement for surviving individuals over 45 years of age was 58 years for males and 48 years for females (ABS, 2007), which means that the disability workforce is likely to retire earlier than that of other industries with a male dominated workforce.

This decrease in workforce capacity coincides with a period in which the need for disability services is increasing. A recent profile of current and future demand for disability services showed that the number of under 65 year olds with severe or profound core activity limitations is projected to increase by 4.8% from 717,500 people in 2005 to 752,100 people by 2010 (AIHW, 2007). This same report also established that already much of the demand for disability services within Australia is not met by the existing workforce (AIHW, 2007).

The recent turmoil in the global economy is expected to impact upon the labour market in Australia, with the Federal Government revising its forecast for unemployment from 4.75% in May 2008 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008) to 5% in November 2008 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2008b). It is not likely that increased unemployment will have any real effect on the labour shortages impacting the disability workforce, especially in the long term, because the need for services will not decrease as a result of these changes in the economy. Retrenchments from other industries might increase the available pool of labour for the disability services industry, particularly because at present there is no minimum educational requirement for entry level positions (NDA/KPMG, 2006). However, many women who are retrenched withdraw from the labour market to take on household duties (Webber & Weller, 2001) and male workers are generally very reluctant to take on roles that are perceived to be traditionally female dominated, such as providing disability services (Charles & Grusky, 2004; England, 2006).

## **1.2. Purpose of the Review**

Given the rising need for disability services and the decreasing pool of available labour, workforce development is of high priority within disability services. The primary objective of this review is to consider the workforce development challenges that have emerged for the Australian disability industry and to develop a framework addressing these challenges. This review will consider the relationship of the industry to the Australian vocational training system.

## **1.3. Structure of the Review**

This review consists of two sections. The first comprises a discussion of workforce development and key international and Australian workforce development programmes. Section two provides a review of workforce development challenges for the Australian disability industry in light of a model of workforce development, which states that workforce development involves three components: managing the size and composition of the workforce, retaining and managing the workforce, and skilling the workforce (NCOSS, 2007).

## **1.4. Extent of the Review**

This review covers material sourced from reports, academic publications, conference presentation material and other web-based grey literature sources. It was not a systematic review, rather several key reports were sourced and supplementary materials were identified via these key reports, reviewed and integrated with the initial material. For the most part, material was excluded from the review if it was published prior to the year 2000. However, a few earlier publications with significant theoretical contributions were also included.

# **2. Workforce Development**

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## **2.1. What is Workforce Development?**

According to Jacobs and Hawley (2007), workforce development has “evolved to describe any one of a relatively wide range of national and international policies and programs related to learning for work” (p.3). The concept was derived from a number of disciplines and consequently there is no agreed upon definition for workforce development (Jacobs & Hawley, 2007). This lack of agreement creates confusion and makes comparison and benchmarking of workforce development programs problematic (King, 2007).

Traditionally, workforce development has been considered to be synonymous with professional development (Jacobs & Hawley, 2007; NCOSS, 2007). The focus has been on developing the individual, primarily through professional training, to up-skill or re-skill workers in order to raise productivity, increase the position of workers within the labour market, and encourage “innovation and adaptation in response to a changing economy within companies” (King, 2007). Other traditional interpretations view workforce development as “identifying and filling current and future jobs in the organisation” or “vocational/technical education and meeting skills shortages” (Staron, 2008).

More recently, workforce development has undergone a conceptual change with research and policies acknowledging the need to incorporate organisations and broader systems into the conceptualisation of workforce development (Roche, 2001). The notion of workforce development has broadened to become “a holistic concept that integrates workforce analysis and planning, human resource management and capability development to strengthen organisational success by aligning the workforce to both current and future service demands” (Staron, 2008).

Strategies for instigating change, targeted not only at the individual but also at both organisational and system levels, include strategic and operational planning; management and leadership skills; governance; recruitment and induction of new staff; performance management and review; professional supervision and mentoring; team building and peer support; and identification of training needs, professional development and the development of a learning organisation (Carson et al, 2007).

Whilst workforce development is concerned with improving the productivity and employability of workers by increasing their skills (PIU, 2001), the shift to “systems thinking” and the resulting focus on interconnectedness, hierarchy and the working environment (Roche, 2001) recognises that “skills can only make a substantive contribution to higher productivity if they are utilised within organisations” (Delbridge et al., 2006, p.15).

Workforce development programs, both within Australia and internationally, have adopted this broader, systemic approach to combat the international issue of skills shortages.

## **2.2. *International Workforce Development Programs***

Four international workforce development programmes identified through the current literature review are outlined below. These are the Finnish Workplace Development Programme, the NHS Changing Workforce Programme (UK), the Better Jobs, Better Care Programme (US), and the NHS Skills Escalator Programme (UK). These programmes were all instigated in situations where the level of skills within the workforce was high, but productivity remained low. Therefore, each of the programmes focuses not on skill formation and training for individuals, but on skill utilisation and maximising productivity through ensuring that skills are applied effectively within the context of the system (Alasoini, 2003; Department of Health, 2007; Kemper, Brannon, Barry, Stott & Heier, 2008; McBride et al., 2006).

The first three workforce development programmes described provide funding to individual projects so that they can implement initiatives which are tailored to their unique circumstances but meet the programme’s broad goals. In each of these cases, those projects that were established gained funding through a competitive selection process, and as a result projects that were more likely to succeed were those that were more likely to be selected for funding (Kemper et al., 2008). The final workforce development programme described was not a funding programme but a nation-wide policy implementation aimed at improving skill utilisation.

### **2.2.1. The Finnish Workplace Development Programme**

The Finnish Workplace Development Programme, conducted between 1996 and 2003, aimed to improve performance and quality of working life through research-supported development of work organisation in the form of job re-design (Alasoini, 2003). The national policy initiative supported more than 1300 workplaces in approximately 700 projects across multiple industries. Funding was provided for expert support in workforce development, dissemination of knowledge about workforce development, and strengthening workplace development infrastructure (Alasoini, 2003; Payne, 2004). Evaluation of the programme outcomes, through self-evaluation questionnaires completed by 419 employees from 91 projects, demonstrated that 91% of respondents assessed the significance and impact of their project to be positive or highly positive, and that 92% of 416 stakeholders surveyed believed that the projects were “meaningful and productive for the development of hosting workplaces” (Alasoini, 2003). These positive outcomes have led to the inception of a follow-up programme entitled ‘The Programme for the Development of Productivity and Quality of Working Life,’ which will continue the goals of the Workplace Development Programme for a further six years (Alasoini, 2003).

Self-evaluation of outcomes, however, tends to produce a positive bias. Payne (2004) used interviews with key policy implementers and researchers, employer organisations, and trade unions, as well as managers and employees from two of the projects to assess whether the self-evaluations provided describe the reality of the Finnish Workplace Development Programme outcomes. These interviews revealed that the projects did not have “much impact on job design or the *utilization* of employees’ skills, knowledge or capabilities” (p.514) and that

*....despite an apparently favourable institutional and political environment for workplace innovation, making progress in this area of policy appears extremely difficult and is likely to require a substantial, long-term investment on the part of policy-makers. (p.517)*

According to Payne (2004), the impact of the projects on work organisation was greatly overstated in the self-assessments used to evaluate the outcomes of the project. That is not to say that the projects have been unsuccessful, rather Payne (2004) points out that “there is very little concrete evidence available to answer how effective the programme has been as a vehicle for delivering ‘the better job’” (p.516), and highlights the need to consider the evaluation of outcomes when developing further workforce development programmes.

### **2.2.2. The NHS Changing Workforce Programme**

The Changing Workforce Programme was conducted between 2001 and 2005 as part of the NHS Plan to reform the health care workforce in the UK in order to forestall serious workforce capacity and productivity issues (NHS Modernisation Agency, 2007; Hargadon, 2001; Department of Health, 2007; NHS, 2000). This initiative focussed on job re-design in order to promote effective skill utilisation. The programme provided job re-design workshops, workforce design consultants and funding to projects at pilot sites across the UK who then implemented one of four “new ways of working”. These were: moving a task up or down a traditionally uni-

disciplinary ladder, expanding the breadth of a job, increasing the depth of a job, or creating new jobs by combining other jobs (Hyde, McBride, Young & Walshe, 2005; Hargadon, 2001). Examples of 'good practice' derived from these pilot projects were then disseminated throughout the NHS via a database and guidebooks (Hargadon, 2001; Department of Health, 2007). An independent evaluation of the project focused on 137 redesigned jobs that had been created at the time of the evaluation. Of these jobs, 28% had been given funding for at least a further year, 64% were still in developmental stages, and only 8% had been discontinued (Hyde et al, 2005). This indicates that there was some success in implementing role redesign, but it does not evaluate the impact of the changes on productivity. The interviews revealed three factors that affected the ease of role re-design implementation: remuneration, management and accountability, and education and training (Hyde et al, 2005).

### **2.2.3. The Better Jobs, Better Care Programme**

The American 'Better Jobs, Better Care' (BJBC) workforce development programme aimed to improve the recruitment and retention of direct care workers in the long-term care industry through improvements in management practice to improve workplace culture (Kemper et al., 2008). This programme was conducted between 2003 and 2008 with funding from the Atlantic Philanthropies and the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation for two programmes: a demonstration programme focussing on implementing policy changes and practice interventions using five demonstration projects in five different states; and an applied research programme focussed on studies of workplace innovations and public policy (Yallowitz & Hofland, 2008). Kemper et al (2008) used a range of qualitative data to examine whether the five BJBC projects were successful in achieving their goals. Whilst it was demonstrated that each of the projects did successfully implement their plans, several factors were shown to affect the ease of implementation. These factors were the availability of demonstration resources (i.e. funding and technical assistance), the presence of a strong and stable leadership and strong relationships with stakeholders, the perception that the lead agency was neutral, the presence of clear goals and effective process, and a favourable state history and context in terms of policy change (Kemper et al, 2008). According to Kemper et al (2008), "improving jobs in long-term care is a challenging, long-term process requiring vision, commitment, and persistence." They suggested the following framework to assist in successfully implementing further workforce development projects: obtain money and staff, engage key stakeholders, pursue a clear vision, develop stakeholders' working relationships, and seek to change the context (Kemper et al, 2008).

### **2.2.4. The NHS Skills Escalator Programme**

Another workforce development strategy implemented as a result of the NHS Plan is the introduction of the so-called 'skills escalator', a nationwide NHS policy intervention that aims to develop staff to "take on delegated tasks or progress into higher level roles" in order to attract and support new recruits and to promote workforce flexibility (McBride et al., 2006). Organisations were free to implement these policy changes in any manner they wished (McBride et al., 2006). Interpretation of how the concept of skills escalation should be implemented varied substantially across organisations thus making evaluation of the success of the strategy problematic (McBride et al, 2006).

Evidence from seven case studies conducted by McBride et al. (2006) demonstrated that the concept of the skills escalator followed one of three models. The 'pick and mix approach' was most commonly employed. It targeted skills escalator activities towards staff according to perceived staff capacity needs and availability of funding. The 'role re-design approach' created new roles to improve efficiency in service deliver. Finally, the whole of organisation approach integrated an organisation-wide provision of learning opportunities into the organisation's goals. Interviews with managers and employees identified that outcomes from individual skills escalator projects included improved basic knowledge and greater self-confidence, improved recruitment and retention for hard to recruit/retain occupations, improved career progression for some staff, potential for improved capacity and access to services through role redesign, and the introduction of non-traditional learners to learning activities which they intended to continue (McBride et al., 2006).

## **2.3. Australian Workforce Development Programs**

### **2.3.1. National Skill Ecosystem Programme**

Buchanan et al. (2001) explored the link between skills and work, and determined that "while skills are not the answer to ensuring future developments at work evolve in a way that benefit employers, workers and the community at large, there can be no answer without skills" (p. 28). The concept of skills ecosystems referred to "a self-sustaining network of workforce skills and knowledge in an industry or region" (Windsor, 2006). It aimed to consider skill development and effective skill utilisation in the context of the whole system relevant institutional arrangements and conditions: economic conditions, the structure of the industry and the labour market, the work environment (i.e. workplace culture, job design and management capability), the role of the education and training system, and the disposition of the individual (Buchanan et al., 2001; NSW Department of Education & Training, 2008). The report recommended that the NSW board of Vocation Education and Training support an initiative to "foster the development and evolution of a number of new demonstration ecosystems" (Buchanan et al, 2001, p. 31).

As a result of this recommendation, the Skill Ecosystem National Project was funded by the Australian Government and managed by the NSW Department of Education and Training. This programme funded nine skill ecosystem demonstration projects between 2003 and 2006. They were designed to improve collaboration between vocational education organisations and industry, to increase workforce sustainability in tight labour markets, and to better align training with industry development needs. At the level of jobs and work organization, they sought to stimulate skill intensive jobs and the supply of appropriately skilled workers by implementing strategies to address use of advanced technology, the model of service delivery, how work is managed or organised, and the design of jobs (Windsor, 2006; NSW Department of Education & Training, 2008). Evaluation of the project revealed that a variety of interventions were implemented, including role re-design, changes in the relationship of the industry with VET-research and innovation, and revising licensing requirements (Windsor, 2006). Interventions were most successful when they were small-scale interventions tailored specifically to the individual ecosystem, or when they brought stakeholders together to work towards a common goal (Windsor, 2006). The project was extended between 2007 and 2008, through the

development of tools and resources for developing skills ecosystems along with dissemination of lessons learned and a methodology for a skill ecosystem approach (National Skill Ecosystem Project, 2008). A further six new skill ecosystem development projects, including the National Disability Service Workforce Project, were provided funding and facilitation in the 2007-2008 period (skillecosystem.net, 2008).

## **2.4. Lessons Learned**

All of the workforce development programmes that were described emphasize that the changes being initiated will take time, funding and policy support, and stakeholder commitment in order to be successfully implemented (Alasoini, 2003; Department of Health, 2007; Kemper et al., 2008; McBride et al., 2006; NSW Department of Education & Training, 2008). Specific lessons to be drawn from these programmes are listed below:

- ❖ The Finnish Workforce Development Programme highlights the need to evaluate the success of the workforce development changes being implemented, and the fact that real change is difficult to achieve. Given the complex nature of workforce development projects and the challenges in assessing the success of the measures being implemented, it is important that a strategy for evaluating outcomes is developed in the initial stages of the project design.
- ❖ The human element of workforce development, the staff, needs to be considered when implementing changes, as illustrated by the NHS Changing Workforce programme. It is important to ensure that workers are consulted in the workforce development process, that they perceive themselves to be fairly remunerated for changes in their work, that any changes in management and accountability are clear from both the employee and the employer perspective, and that necessary education and training are provided to employees when their work is changed, so that individual workers participate in implementing workforce changes rather than working against them.
- ❖ The BJBC programme in the US emphasized that it is important to ensure that workforce development projects have a clear goal and a clear strategy for implementing the goal that outlines not just funding and staffing needs, but also the role of stakeholders in attaining that goal. Small scale changes that are tailored to the unique context of the individual organisation are most likely to succeed, as are initiatives that bring the various stakeholders together to work on a single goal. This was demonstrated by the NHS 'skills escalator' programme in the UK, and the Australian National Skill Ecosystem programme.

## **3. Workforce Development & the Disability Workforce**

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According to NCOSS (2007), "Workforce Development can be seen as a combination of managing the size and composition of the workforce, retaining and managing that workforce and skilling that workforce" (p. 2). This is the framework upon which the

remainder of this literature review will consider workforce development challenges in the Australian disability workforce. The following section will consider each of these components of workforce development and what we do and do not know about them in terms of the national disability workforce based on our review of current literature.

### **3.1. Managing Workforce Size and Composition**

Best practice in workforce development is dependant upon the ability to access adequate data about the present and future characteristics of the workforce, current and future demand for services, and current and future supply of workers (Martin & Moskos, 2006).

*“Without a clear understanding of who forms the workforce it is not possible to ensure that appropriate strategies are in place to support their ongoing development. Moreover, it is not possible to monitor changes over time or to plan for future changes. Such information is of pivotal importance.” Roche (2000, p.9)*

Information generated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) is the primary source for workforce data in Australia. Data concerned with industry is classified using the Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification (ABS, 2008). However this classification, even at the most descriptive 4-digit level, does not allow subsections of the community services industry to be identified. Since disability services are included under the broader heading of ‘community services’, ABS data using this classification does not allow estimates of the disability workforce and its characteristics to be obtained (Martin & Moskos, 2006). No source other than the ABS has been identified that might capture comprehensive data on the disability services workforce. Ideally, such data, needed for workforce development and planning, would include turnover rates, cost of turnover, fill/ vacancy rates, average number of hours worked, days and cost of staff training, and remuneration and uptake of salary packaging (NDS, 2007).

In the absence of comprehensive workforce data, the AIHW (2007) report on the ‘Current and future demand for specialist disability services’ and the National Disability Administrators (NDA)/KPMG (2006) ‘Investigation into Disability Workforce Capacity Issues Research Report’ relied on information focussing solely on government provided services. In the following section we draw upon some of the data provided by these reports. Although this data was suitable for the purposes of these reports, it is not adequate for workforce planning and development. Workforce planning and development require detailed information about the workforce in *both* government and non-government sectors so that workforce size and composition can be managed.

#### **3.1.1. Supply Issues**

Based entirely on data about the government-employed disability services workforce, the NDA/KPMG (2006) report described the national direct care disability workforce as ageing (with over half of its workers being aged between 40 and 50 years) and predominantly female (with 69% of workers being female). A review of disability services within the Southern Metropolitan Region of Victoria

conducted between 2005 and 2006, also described an ageing workforce with a high proportion of females. The report found that about 40% of the non-Government sector was 45 or older, and 75% of these workers were female (LIME, 2006). This profile of an older, female dominated labour force indicates potential for significant labour supply problems, particularly at a time when demand for services is increasing (LIME, 2006; NDA/KPMG, 2006; NDS, 2007). Older workers are closer to retiring age, and female workers are likely to retire earlier (ABS, 2007). Moreover, women may withdraw from paid work either permanently or temporarily when they have children (Martin, 2007), and when working in care work make use of flexible part-time or casual work to manage work and family responsibilities (Martin & King, 2008). This is exacerbated by the fact that, at a broad level, women's participation in the Australian labour force has increased (Richardson, 2007), which means that the traditional pool from which disability services recruit new staff has decreased (NDA/KPMG, 2006).

Across the Australian labour market, the increasing educational achievement of the Australian population combined with decreases in the available pool of labour has led to increased competition for workers across industries (NDA/KMPG, 2006; LIME, 2006). In order to attract and retain workers, the disability workforce needs to provide better conditions and opportunities for advancement than other sectors (NDA/KMPG, 2006). Historically, disability services arose through community based welfare with volunteer staff and therefore had no need for the promotion of career development pathways (NDS, 2007). At present, the structure of the industry includes degree qualified professional staff, certificate qualified semi-professional staff, and non professional staff with no minimum qualification (NDA/KMPG, 2006). However, no information was identified through this literature review in relation to the distribution of qualifications across the sector, and workers' ability and/or desire to progress along a career pathway. This information is vital to planning career pathways which in turn improve the attraction and retention of the workforce. The industry is also perceived to have a low status (LIME, 2006) and is not promoted as a positive career choice (NDS, 2007). However, it should be noted that recent research into the aged care workforce, which has very similar characteristics to the disability workforce, has shown that staff perceptions of how their work is viewed by consumers and the public is more negative than the actual perceptions held by consumers and the public. In fact, consumers and the general public view aged care workers to be compassionate and caring rather than under-qualified and neglectful (Mundy, 2008). Given that the abovementioned perceptions of the disability workforce were derived from information provided by the workforce (LIME, 2006; NDS, 2007), the potential that the work is not viewed as negatively by the public and disability service consumers should be taken into account.

The LIME (2006) report identifies work design and practice as drivers of the supply of disability workers. Casualisation, job insecurity, the increasing isolation of workers, and HR practices and organisational culture all impact upon job satisfaction and therefore the ability to attract and retain workers (LIME, 2006). There is certainly a need to collect comprehensive information about these aspects of the disability workforce. However, other changes in the field may impact either positively or negatively on the supply of workers. Particularly significant developments include changing service delivery models, increased compliance obligations, and the shifting

expectations of workers within the disability services which have resulted in changes to work structures and job design (NDS, 2007).

Low industry attractiveness, increasing competition for workers across industries, the decreasing size of the pool of potential labour from which the disability services traditionally recruits its staff, the changing nature of disability work, and the characteristics of the workforce present real challenges for the supply of disability workers in the future. They have resulted in the need for measures to be taken to attract new and additional staff, encourage women back into the workforce, re-skill the ageing workforce, manage an ageing workforce, and provide exit strategies for those wishing to leave the workforce (NDA/KPMG, 2006). In order to do this effectively, comprehensive information about the characteristics, drivers, and work status of the national disability workforce are required.

### **3.1.2. Demand Issues**

Even at present, demand for disability services is not always met. The profile of current and future demand for disability services constructed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare showed that in 2005 the unmet demand for accommodation and respite services was approximately 23,800 people, unmet demand for community access services was around 3,700 people, and unmet demand for disability employment services was about 1,700 people (AIHW, 2007). As discussed above, demand for disability services within Australia is increasing, primarily as a result of the ageing population, which means that people are living longer and are entering the system as a result of age related disability, and people with disability are staying in the system longer and have more complex needs (LIME, 2006; NDA/KPMG, 2006).

Broader population and labour force trends in Australia that may impact upon the need for disability services include: *the location of Australia's population*, which is becoming increasingly coastal and more urbanised requiring an increase in services in these areas; *the cultural diversity of the population*, requiring the workforce to provide for the needs of the increasing culturally and linguistically diverse population and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population; and *decreased family size and increases in the number of working women*, leading to increased demand for services as traditional informal carers are no longer available (NDA/KPMG, 2006; LIME, 2006). The availability of informal carers in the community is also impacted by the breakdown of family structures, increases in social isolation, and reductions in the incidence of volunteering (LIME, 2006).

The LIME (2006) report into disability services in the Southern Metropolitan Region of Victoria also identified several factors increasing the demand on the disability workforce. It noted the increasing complexity of disability services arising through such trends as increasing consumer expectations of service quality, accessibility and responsiveness; provision of individualised planning and support; the introduction of matching profiles of client and worker; and service provision in clients' homes and the community. Funding constraints, increased emphasis on the productivity and effectiveness of the workforce, policy changes and the need to keep up with new technology to assist people with disabilities all put further pressure on the

workforce. It is highly likely that similar factors impact on the Australian disability workforce as a whole (LIME, 2006).

### **3.2. Retaining and Managing the Workforce**

*It is increasingly considered that contemporary labour management practices can play a key role in enabling firms to realise the full productive potential of their employees. (Delbridge et al, 2006, p. 21)*

Retaining and managing the workforce ensures that skills, once acquired, are effectively utilised and maintained within the industry. The loss of skills through turnover of staff or ineffective management practices can not only be costly, but can also impede productivity (Hall, 2005).

It has been consistently demonstrated that there is a negative relationship between job satisfaction and turnover and similarly between organisational commitment and turnover, such that turnover decreases when either of these factors increase (Hall, 2005b). According to Herzberg (1968), factors that promote job satisfaction are intrinsic to the job (i.e. achievement, recognition, the work itself, responsibility, advancement) and factors that promote job dissatisfaction are extrinsic to the job (i.e. company policy and administration, supervision, interpersonal relationships, working conditions, salary, status, and security). Thus factors that produce job satisfaction are different than those that produce job dissatisfaction. Addressing intrinsic factors will increase job satisfaction and therefore decrease turnover, and addressing extrinsic factors will enhance commitment and increase intent to stay, which also promotes reductions in turnover (Herzberg, 1968).

#### **3.2.1. Understanding the Drivers and Motivators for the Workforce**

Understanding what motivates and drives the workforce is vital in ensuring job satisfaction (Hall, 2005). According to the NDS (2007), “low industry attractiveness, a shrinking national labour pool and a lack of understanding of contemporary work “drivers” of both traditional and non-traditional groups employed in the disability sector have resulted in the sector being poorly positioned to attract and keep suitable qualified staff” (p. 2). Information, not only about the characteristics of the national disability workforce, but also about the drivers and motivators of this workforce, is required.

The present literature review did not identify any nation-wide source of information about what drives the disability workforce. However the LIME (2006) report identified what motivates the disability workforce in the Southern Metropolitan Region of Victoria. A survey of disability support workers in this region identified that personal satisfaction and achievement, and the opportunity to make a difference and develop relationships with clients and families, were the key factors in attracting staff to the workforce (LIME, 2006). The same survey also found that increased pay, more training and skill development, and improved coordination and communication would encourage them to continue working in the industry (LIME, 2006). Whilst this gives us some insight into what motivates the disability workforce, it is important to collect this data on a nation-wide level. NDS (2007) noted that the

expectations of employees are shifting and it is important for the purposes of workforce development that it is known how these expectations are changing. Once it is understood what drives and motivates the workforce, measures can be undertaken to improve workplace dynamics to ensure that the job provides the correct mix of extrinsic factors (i.e. the opportunity to make a difference and to develop relationships with clients and families) to decrease job dissatisfaction.

### **3.2.2. Skill Utilisation**

*Current policies, aimed primarily at increasing the supply of skills/qualifications, need to be combined with broader measures designed to impact upon these wider areas of in-firm activity, so as to ensure that skills are brought into productive play and used to generate improved economic performance. (Delbridge et al, 2006, p. 15)*

As noted in the international workforce development programmes discussed above, skill acquisition alone does not ensure optimal productivity. This requires skill acquisition in coordination with effective management of the workforce to ensure best possible skill utilisation, which then leads to optimal productivity (Delbridge et al., 2006). In Australia, 37% of employers report that their employees have skill levels above what is necessary for their work, and 10-15% of employees report that their skills are under-utilised; this proportion is higher in low skilled occupations (Watson, 2008:2008b). This suggests that although overall skill acquisition in Australia is successful, skills are not always optimally utilised.

Work re-organisation through job re-design can have a dual effect, improving productivity and increasing job satisfaction through job enrichment, which entails effective utilisation of skills in such a manner as to promote the psychological growth of the employee (Herzberg, 1968). As Delbridge et al (2006) noted, work re-organisation is not just a technical process; it involves human beings and therefore must take account of the desires and expectations of the individual. One of the lessons learned from the workforce development programmes described above is the need to ensure the cooperation of the workforce in order to successfully implement workforce development initiatives. Role re-design can occur through creating new jobs by combining other jobs, expanding the breadth or increasing the depth of a job, or by moving a task up or down a traditionally uni-disciplinary ladder (Hyde et al., 2005). If done correctly this can improve the ability of the individual to best employ their skills, thus satisfying the intrinsic job factors that promote job satisfaction. The workforce development programmes described in sections 2.2 and 2.3 of this report highlight the importance of developing a clear goal, a strategy for attaining that goal, and a strategy for evaluating the outcomes of any changes implemented, prior to instigating any changes.

In the disability services, recent changes to service delivery models from predominantly residential care to increasingly community and home care, coupled with increased compliance obligations (NDS, 2007), have changed the nature of the work. Re-evaluation of work organisation and how it fits with the expectations of the workforce is therefore necessary to ensure that skill utilisation is maximised in a manner that enriches jobs and promotes job satisfaction, which in turn increases workforce retention, as well as promoting productivity.

### **3.3. Skilling the Workforce**

#### **3.3.1. Skills Formation**

Formalised skill formation through training is, to date, the most prevalent form of workforce development. Improving and maintaining skills is necessary to ensure that the workforce has the best possible level of skills necessary for their work, and that these skills are not lost due to lack of practice (NEVER, 2007). Updating of skills is also necessary to keep up with constant technological changes. In Australia, 14% of employees report that they have limited opportunities for skill enhancement, and this proportion increases in less skilled occupations (Watson, 2008: 2008b).

Skills formation occurs primarily through formal training. However informal learning can also promote skills acquisition. The changing nature of disability work to the more individual, less centralised style of community-based service provision decreases the opportunity for informal learning (NDS, 2007). This is exacerbated by time constraints due to increased compliance obligations, increased travel requirements, and an increased emphasis on productivity, which have been introduced by the new models of service delivery (NDS, 2007).

#### **3.3.2. The Relationship of the Disability Industry to the Australian Training System**

The structure of the Australian disability services industry is three-tiered, consisting of professional staff who hold a degree qualification, semi-professional staff who hold a certificate level qualification, and non-professional staff who have no minimum qualification requirements (NDA/KPMG, 2006). Therefore, whilst skill formation for professional staff in disability services will be provided through the University system, the predominant form of skill formation for the Australian disability services workforce will be vocational education and training (VET) provided by private registered training organisations and public technical and further education (TAFE) institutes.

VET is designed to educate people for entry or re-entry to the workforce, to train or retrain people for a new job, to upgrade skill, or to create pathways to further education (NCVER, 2007). The system follows a competency based approach where students have to demonstrate specific skills against agreed industry standards, which are set out in training packages (NCVER, 2007). These packages can be tailored to meet specific enterprise or industry needs and are non-prescriptive in terms of teaching strategies, completion time, or assessment methods (NCVER, 2007). Qualifications that can be provided by VET include certificates I, II, III, and IV, diploma, advanced diploma, vocational graduate certificate and vocational graduate diploma (NCVER, 2007). Disability services qualifications primarily fall under the Community Services Training Package, which the NDS helped to review in 2007. The revised package, endorsed in November 2008, aims to ensure that provided competencies are directly relevant to the job role, that education and training reflects new jobs, that cultural change in human resource management will support and retain workers, and that employers and employees are involved in the development of current and relevant competencies (CSHISC, 2008; NDS, 2007).

According to the NDS (2007), the disability industry has, to date, not made effective use of national training and qualifications, with poor uptake of traineeships and limited access to formal training and recognition processes. Developing the appropriate infrastructure to promote skills enhancement by providing clear career pathways, encouraging workplace cultures that promote learning, and supporting small service providers to invest in staff development are needed, in conjunction with training programmes that are tailored to meet the needs of the disability services workforce. The Australian VET system is in the process of positioning itself as a key stakeholder in workforce development (Comyn, 2008; Eddington, 2007), and the disability industry may take advantage of this when it comes to reviewing its skill formation strategies.

## **4. Conclusion**

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The common theme throughout contemporary workforce development literature, both international and Australian, is the notion that workforce development requires not just skill formation, but effective skill utilisation in combination with skill formation. The present literature review has adopted a definition of workforce development supplied by NCOSS (2007), that workforce development consists of managing the size and composition of the workforce, retaining and managing the workforce, and skilling the workforce.

It is important to know who the workforce is, and to ensure that the workforce has the capacity to meet demand for services now and in the future. Appropriate measures need to be taken by the disability services industry to ensure that the current ageing and female dominated workforce profile does not result in an inability to meet service demands. This literature review identified the need to collect and maintain comprehensive national data about the disability workforce in order to conduct effective workforce planning to match workforce supply with demand for services.

A workforce needs to be properly managed in order to retain staff (and therefore maintain skill levels) and to ensure that skills are utilised efficiently and effectively within the industry. In order to provide the workforce with what Buchanan et al (2001) call “decent work”, that is work that workers find fulfilling rather than just labour, it is necessary to understand what drives and motivates the workforce. Tailoring job design and workplace dynamics to meet employee expectation acts to increase job satisfaction and decrease job dissatisfaction, leading to increased workforce retention as well as improved skill utilisation. Given that recent changes to the service delivery model have changed the nature of disability services work, the industry needs to better understand how these changes affect job design and workplace dynamics, and whether changes need to be made to improve skill utilisation. In instigating changes it is important that: outcomes are evaluated and strategies for assessing outcomes are developed prior to implementing changes; the workforce are involved and cooperate in implementing changes; and a clear goal exists and a strategy for attaining that goal is developed prior to implementation.

Skill formation without proper understanding of workforce composition needs or good practices for skill utilisation within the workplace is likely to result in a situation in which the workforce is ineffectively skilled for their work. This may

occur through over-skilling, obtaining the wrong skills, or obtaining the correct skills but in a manner that is inefficient. Training needs to be developed in consultation with the VET system in a manner that takes the whole system into account. Skill development within the disability services needs to be addressed in consultation with VET training providers. However, before this can happen, attention needs to be directed toward the need for data about who the workforce is and what drives them, and then toward ensuring effective skill utilisation through appropriate job design and workplace dynamics.

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