



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

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

FINAL PROJECT REPORT PHASE 2

Project title: National Disability Workforce Project

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Programme funded under: National Skills Shortage Strategy on behalf of the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Objective of project/research: The aim of the project is to increase awareness of the workforce capacity challenges being faced by the non government disability sector, to build relationships with VET providers and other stakeholders, and to trial a range of strategies to attract and retain skilled workers.

Introduction/background:

The NDS National workforce project has been undertaken in an environment of significant social, political and economic change, growing levels of unmet demand for service, and an uncertain industrial relations context. It has also occurred at a time of transition in the Australian V.E.T (Vocational Education and Training) policy environment, with focus shifting from training delivery to building the capacity of industry to attract, develop and effectively utilise skilled, committed staff.

This project was imbedded in these changing agendas with a focus on strengthening the relationship with the VET sector as well as strengthening internal processes around recruitment and retention. It aimed at building industry capability to influence the nature and content of training, as well as capability to manage a sustainable, skilled workforce in the future.

The project aimed at better positioning the sector for the future by providing tools and data organisations could use to better understand their existing workforce, and plan for the future. It engaged 13 pilot sites across Australia to voluntarily undertake an analysis of their own specific workforce issues, articulate the assumptions underlying these issues, test them through a range of strategies, and collect and interpret data on the outcomes. The project has significantly impacted on the ability of the pilot sites to manage their workforce in fluctuating economic cycles and the associated variations in the labour market.

The project has been well placed in time, providing significant learnings for both NDS and the VET sector. The project funding provided structural, technical and professional support for each of the projects, however, the actual activities of the pilots were undertaken as continuous business improvement processes within the organisations, and were not funded by the project.

Main participants/industry/occupations: *identify specific industries and/or occupations identified in the report.*

The focus of this project has been on the paid workforce in the funded, not for profit disability service industry and included disability organisations representing a broad range of service types and locations.

Summary of findings: *highlight main findings of research/project – can be in dot point format.*

A range of key themes/findings were identified by the project steering group as a result of their participation in the pilot project debrief workshop. These themes were consistent with those arising from the most significant change conversations, qualitative responses to the online survey, and feedback received during the awareness raising workshops conducted in phase one of the project. Each of these themes has implications at both policy and operational levels and are currently being considered by the NDS National Workforce Committee as part of their strategic planning.

1. Importance of Data

Data plays an important role in understanding our current workforce (composition and key drivers); monitoring demographic change; measuring our performance; and planning for the future. Access to benchmarking data, broad labour market demographics, and the workforce planning tool were very useful. *Continued access to this data will position the industry well to respond to workforce challenges.*

2. Staff Engagement

Staff engagement is an important but often ignored element of success in recruitment and retention strategies. While most pilot projects engaged staff at a higher level than usual in promoting and implementing their strategies, this element was not well acknowledged as a critical success factor. The experience of the pilots when engaging staff included, but was not limited to, a lift in staff morale as a result of being included in the strategy (e.g. creative design of recruitment advertisement); a sense of ownership of the strategy; and, in the case of one pilot site, inviting their family and friends to attend recruitment information sessions. *Strong engagement of staff in planning, implementing and evaluating the design and effectiveness of recruitment, retention and other workforce development activities needs to be promoted as a critical success factor to the sector.*

3. Job Design within the broader context of service redesign to reflect contemporary workplace requirements and client expectations.

Job design, based on current work requirements is a useful starting point for responding to workforce challenges. Those pilots, who used a review of job design to test their assumptions before proceeding with solutions, found it a useful process. *There is significant scope for NDS to expand the range and utilisation of job redesign tools in a subsequent piece of work.*

4. Career Paths

The importance of clear, well promoted careers paths, including opportunities for traineeships and the recognition of advanced practice was evident throughout the project. *Further opportunities for the industry lie in continuing to build relationships with the VET and University sectors, the creation of advanced practice job roles, and alignment of these job roles with relevant qualifications from the National Community Services Training Package.*

5. Interface with the Vocational Education and Training System

The interface with VET was a common point of focus for the pilot projects, with a number of sites actively building relationships with local providers, customising training, aligning their induction training with competencies etc. *The quality of this relationship and the level of confidence by service providers around the negotiation of customised units of competency is a clear target for further NDS attention.*

6. Recruitment and Retention

While the pilot sites explored a range of recruitment and retention strategies, project design and a limited timeframe for the work of the pilot sites did not allow for evaluation of impact. *Extending the gains made by the pilot sites by providing further opportunity for them to systematically implement and monitor high value strategies would be useful. Opportunities for the pilot site key contacts to buddy with other services and support the systematic trial and reporting on strategies used would also be considered appropriate.*

Project/research outcomes: *what do the results of the project/research show? What are the implications/impact for the VET sector?*

With regard to the objective of this project, that is, building industry capacity to respond to workforce challenges, the key outcomes have been as follows:

- Increased level of awareness of disability workforce issues, in the broader labour market context, as evidenced by strong attendance at the recent NDS Workforce conference (May, 2009), feedback from awareness raising sessions and pilot participants.
- NDS is well positioned to influence key strategies such as the National Disability Workforce Strategy, the National Community Services and Health Training Package, the ANZSCO job classifications, and the National Community Services Workforce Profiling project being undertaken by the National Institute of Labour Studies.
- Increased capacity within a range of service providers from each state and territory (13 pilot sites) to systematically test and capture data on recruitment and retention strategy trials.
- Strengthened relationship across several regions of Australia, between disability organisations and VET providers/University partners around the delivery of disability work training

The project also highlights that in spite of its challenges, the disability sector is highly motivated and capable of undertaking the work of informing VET and the broader human service policy agenda.

Recommendations: *What should be done next and by whom? Does the project highlight strategies for implementing solutions to issues raised? Is further research required? Are there any future projections for skills requirements in the industry?*

The NDS Workforce Issues Committee has considered the key findings from the project (p.2) and identified a number of priorities for action, to further strengthen capacity to respond to disability workforce challenges. These include but will not be limited to the following:

1. To work with the sector to establish a vision for the skilled, committed workforce it needs for the future.

The realisation of this vision will require

- real time access to a comprehensive, data base on disability workforce indicators (including skill utilisation) and demographic trends
- It will also require additional developmental work with service providers to build capacity to utilise data for performance management and planning.
- It will also require significant service redesign and job redesign work to ensure service providers are well positioned to attract and retain a workforce that can deliver on client expectations for flexible, person centred service responses.

2. To systematically examine the impact of 3-4 high value strategies (that emerged from the pilots and other elements of the project) across a minimum of 100 services across the sector.

3. To work with disability organisations and the VET/University sectors to build service provider confidence and skill in customising National Qualifications and skill sets to reflect local workplace requirements and service delivery needs.

4. To strengthen uptake of disability traineeships for both new and existing workers, with NDS well placed to inform the policy environment, and to coordinate traineeships at a local level. NDS would ideally establish a series of targets for uptake and be involved in actively promoting traineeships both for entry into the sector, and for career path progression.

5. To influence the dissemination of the learnings from the 13 pilots and other elements of the project, to the broader sector.

With regard to future projections of training needs in the disability sector, NDS as the disability peak body, with appropriate resources, is well placed to identify and inform government on the skills needed to underpin contemporary service provision and business practice for the industry.

Feedback from key stakeholders outside of the sector indicate that the NDS workforce project has been one of the most effective workforce development projects that has occurred in Australia recently. NDS is well placed to progress this work, should additional project funding become available.

Date: June 2009