

WorkAbility Queensland Evaluation Stage 2 Report

- Lockyer, Ipswich, Somerset & Scenic Rim

WorkAbility Qld Steering Committee

September 2017

Table of contents

Table of contents	2
Introduction.....	3
Methodology	3
Overview	3
Findings.....	6
Overview of WorkAbility Queensland in the LISS region	6
Status against baseline indicators	7
Considerations for WorkAbility Queensland implementation	18
Positive developments	18
Conclusion	20
Acknowledgements.....	21
References	21

Introduction

WorkAbility Queensland is the non-government sector workforce development strategy for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in Queensland. It has been developed by a consortium of peak industry bodies in collaboration with key government agencies. The aim of the strategy is to meet the identified workforce needs of non-government organisations providing services to people with disability in Queensland, and to build workforce supply and capability to meet consumer need and demand under the NDIS.

The approach taken by WorkAbility Queensland is to establish Local WorkAbility Networks, supported by a local coordinator, in each of the 13 NDIS regions to develop and drive a workforce action plan for the region. The local networks are supported by funding and broad initiatives which are managed at a Statewide level.

WorkAbility Queensland is overseen by a Steering Committee comprising senior representatives from the consortium, being the Community Services and Health Workforce Council (the Workforce Council), National Disability Services (NDS), the Community Services Industry Alliance (CSIA) and the Queensland Council of Social Services (QCOSS).

Outpost Consulting has been commissioned to evaluate the Strategy to provide information to assist the WorkAbility Queensland Steering Committee to make future policy, program and investment decisions in relation to the NDIS workforce.

The evaluation is progressing in three stages:

Stage 1: Foundation work to set up the evaluation, included developing a theory of change and agreed performance indicators, as well as undertaking a scoping study in Townsville to understand the best approaches for data collection and lessons for the roll-out in other locations. This stage was completed in February 2017.

Stage 2: Collection of baseline data across two regions during the early stages of implementation – Whitsunday, Isaac, Mackay (the Mackay region) and Ipswich, Lockyer Valley, Scenic Rim and Somerset (the LISS region).

Stage 3: Follow-up baseline data collection by collecting outcome data collection after 12 months of implementation of WorkAbility Queensland, including sourcing and synthesizing a range of secondary data sources to understand the community level impacts of the Strategy. This stage will be completed in June 2018.

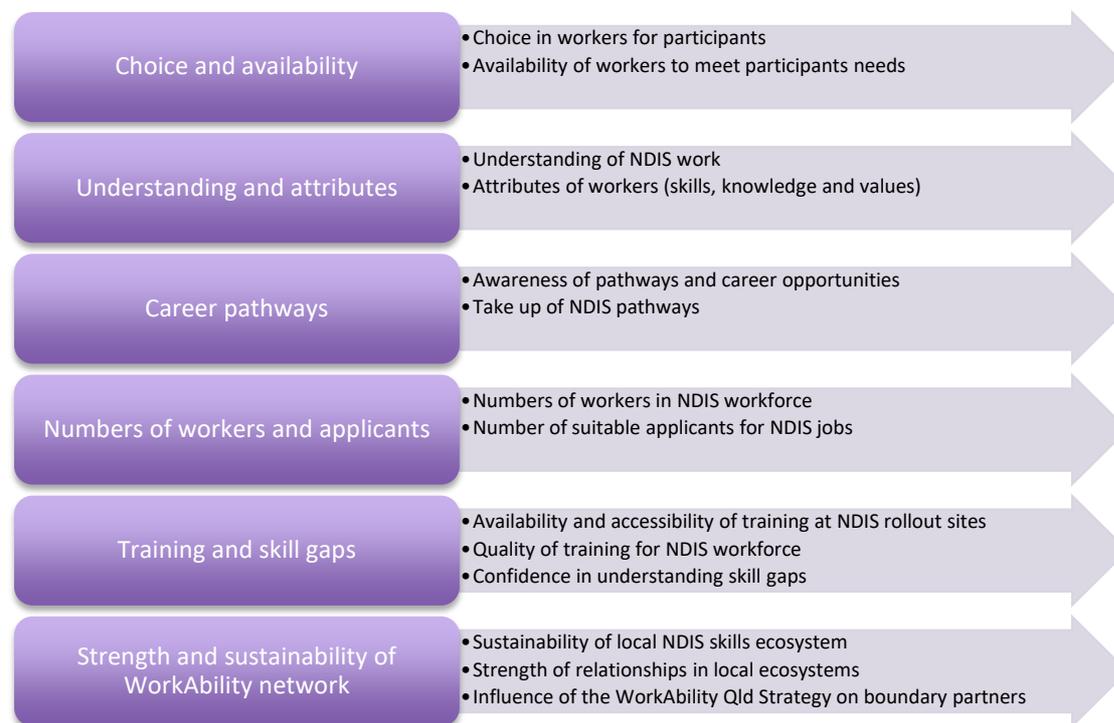
This report details findings from Stage 2 of the evaluation in the LISS region. It details the baseline status in the LISS region against the agreed indicators and presents considerations for the remainder of the roll-out of the WorkAbility Strategy.

Methodology

Overview

The foundation work for the evaluation included developing a theory of change which is a comprehensive description of how and why a desired change is expected to happen in a particular context. The WorkAbility Queensland theory of change was agreed by the Steering Committee in October 2016 and formed the basis for the development of the evaluation plan which was agreed by the Steering Committee in November 2016.

Using the theory of change, 14 indicators were developed which are grouped into six themes. These are:



Following this foundation work, a scoping study was undertaken in Townsville and a report provided to the Steering Committee which outlined success factors, challenges and risks, and advice for other sites.

Stage 2 of the evaluation has used the 14 evaluation indicators to consider the experience in two WorkAbility Queensland sites in the early stages of NDIS implementation. This data forms a baseline from which to look at progress made by the WorkAbility Queensland Strategy in 12 months' time (June 2018).

The baseline data collection involved a combination of primary research with different population groups and secondary research, drawing on existing data collections, in two implementation sites – LISS and Mackay regions.

The following methods were used in both LISS and Mackay regions:

i) Observations and conversations with the local Network – The evaluator attended an early Network meeting, presented information about the evaluation and had discussions with members. This meeting provided data on hopes, aspirations and expectations of the Network. The conversations also provided an opportunity to secure commitment to the evaluation from local stakeholders and support in recruiting participants.

ii) Interview with Coordinator – a semi-structured interview with each local WorkAbility Coordinator provided insights into how the Networks operate, activities conducted, progress towards goals and challenges for the project.

iii) Participant interviews and focus group – in-depth face to face interviews were conducted with NDIS participants and potential participants to gain a more detailed understanding of their experiences with and expectations of workers. Between 7 and 10 participants were interviewed in each of the evaluation sites. A \$30 store voucher was offered to interview participants as a gesture of thanks for their time and contribution.

In LISS, the interviews were supplemented by a focus group with local NDIS participants. Using cards, participants indicated the top three values and top three skills they require from their workers, followed by a group discussion about why particular attributes were important to them.

iv) *Worker Survey* – NDIS workers were surveyed on self-perceptions of skills, knowledge and values, understanding of NDIS work, reasons for entering the sector, awareness of career pathways and opportunities. The survey was disseminated through a range of channels including the local WorkAbility Queensland Networks and industry bodies including NDS, CSIA and QCOSS.

In LISS, the survey data was supplemented with data from a short poll of workers who attended the LISS region Fresh Futures market – an event aimed at connecting people with disabilities with service providers.

v) *Employer telephone interviews* – In each location 7-10 telephone interviews were held with employers. The interviews covered issues such as attributes of staff, understanding of NDIS work, challenges with recruitment, quality of the training available, confidence in understanding skill gaps.

vi) *Secondary data analysis* – This involved analysing workforce profiles prepared by the Workforce Council, preliminary information collected from service providers through NDS’s Workforce Wizard platform, Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) and university enrolment data, and information about RTO and university offerings.

LISS evaluation participants

The findings from the LISS baseline research draw on the insights and views of individuals in the LISS area plus the discussions of a large group at the local WorkAbility network meeting (Table 1).

Table 1: LISS evaluation participants

Method	Number of participants	Subgroups
Observations and discussions of Local Network	49	Service providers x 22 Government x 11 Employment agencies x 3 Education providers x 10 Other x 5
Coordinator interview	1	N/A
Participant interviews/focus group	8	Mental health x 1 Intellectual disability x 4 Physical disability x 2 Dual diagnosis x 1
Employee survey	12	<u>Cultural background</u> Indigenous x 1 <u>Region</u> Ipswich x 7 Scenic Rim x 2 <u>Employment type</u> Disability support worker x 5 Mental health support worker x 2 Management x 4
Employee poll	7	Mental health worker x 2 Coordinator x 3 Disability support worker x 2
Employer interviews	8	Specialist mental health x 2 Mixed client-base x 4 Indigenous x 1 LAC x 1

Limitations

The key limitation was the low response rate to the survey for NDIS workers. This is likely due to the fact that support workers are generally away from the office and would have difficulty finding the time to fill in a survey. The employee poll held at the Ipswich Fresh Futures market was designed to supplement the survey responses.

Quantitative data on the workforce in Ipswich is still fairly limited. The Workforce Wizard tool used to collect workforce data from NDIS service providers is in early days of implementation. Data was only available in relation to two organisations and 223 workers in the Ipswich region at the time of finalising this report.

Findings

Overview of WorkAbility Queensland in the LISS region

The LISS region has 305,757 residents, with 17,825 (6%) identifying as having a need for assistance in core activities. This is higher than the Queensland average of 5.2%. The LISS region also has a slightly higher proportion of people identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander than the Queensland average - 4.1% or about 12,000 residents, versus 4% for Queensland.ⁱ

The area has been experiencing relatively high population growth at an average annual rate of 2.7% since 2011, compared to 1.6% in Queensland, with the Ipswich and Somerset areas leading the growth.ⁱⁱ The demography of the region is diverse. Ipswich itself has a young age profile, while Scenic Rim and Somerset has an older than average median age. In Ipswich nearly 10% of residents are from non-English speaking countries (close to the Queensland average), whereas the proportion is much lower Lockyer Valley, Scenic Rim and Somerset.

The forecasted number of new workers needed in the LISS region to support the NDIS is between 1,450 and 2,800, There are fewer workers per 100,000 population in this region in the four key NDIS occupations (aged and disabled carers, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and speech professionals) than in Queensland overall.ⁱⁱⁱ

The NDIS became available in LISS from June 2017. The WorkAbility Strategy began in the region about three months prior with the employment of the Local WorkAbility Coordinator in March 2017 and the first NDIS Workforce Forum held on 5 April 2017.

The Forum was the first opportunity for all stakeholders in the region to come together to discuss workforce opportunities and challenges likely to result from the NDIS. The forum brought together 120 participants, a cross section of the skills ecosystem in the region. Service providers, education and training providers, employment services, government and non-government workers and future NDIS participants had the opportunity to listen to, explore and share insights about the emerging NDIS workforce. This event was also an opportunity for stakeholders to nominate to become a member of the Local WorkAbility Network.

At the Forum, a Regional Workforce Profile for the LISS region, developed through the WorkAbility Strategy, was launched. This profile contained statistical data about population, existing workforce and the education and training pipeline. It helped WorkAbility staff and the local network to better understand the demand for, and potential supply of, workers to support the NDIS rollout in the region, as well as areas of opportunity and risk for delivery of services to participants.

After the May Forum, the Local WorkAbility Coordinator established the WorkAbility Network based on nominees from the Forum. The Network has about 55 members, including service providers, RTOs, Job Actives and government representatives.

The first three Network meetings were aimed at developing a Workforce Plan to guide the group's work for the next 10 months. The Workforce Plan details strategies and actions for the future workforce and the current workforce.

The Coordinator's role is to work with the partners to implement the actions in the Workforce Plan. A key action which is unique to the LISS region is the Disability Jobs Roadshow model. This involves delivering an industry attraction and pre-employment program for jobseekers through a collaboration of employers (service providers), employment providers and training providers. Within the first four months of operation, 10 Roadshow sessions have been held.

Status against baseline indicators

1. Choice and availability of workers

Choice in providers

According to the Local Area Coordinator, LISS has a relatively large number of existing disability providers. This is due to its proximity to a number of institutions that were closed down as part of the deinstitutionalisation process which occurred in Queensland in the 1980s and 1990s. Community based services were established when people with disability and mental illness were moved out of large institutions in the area, including the Challinor Centre and the Basil Stafford Centre.

Nevertheless, a review of the number of registered providers with head offices in the LISS region indicates that while there are about 16 providers registered in the area, three large providers dominate in Ipswich, offering services across the majority of service groups. There are two dominant providers in the Scenic Rim area, one in Somerset and one in the Lockyer Valley.

It is important to note, however, that many Brisbane and Gold Coast service providers service the greater Ipswich area and some have established branch offices in Ipswich. To give a sense of the size of the provider market in Ipswich, a 'Fresh Futures Market' was held in at the Ipswich showgrounds in September 2017. This event was an opportunity for people with disability and their families to connect with service providers offering a range of different services. Eighty services providers had stalls at the Fresh Futures Market. A further 15 were turned away due to lack of space.

Still, the large majority of NDIS service providers in the LISS region appear to be medium and large organisations. There is an opportunity in LISS for many more small organisations and sole traders to enter the registered provider market. Interviews with stakeholders indicate that the registration process may present a barrier for this group of providers.

Subcontractors and sole traders will be an important part of the workforce. There's a role for bookkeepers, recruiters/matchers, tradesmen, gardeners, cleaners, cooks and transport providers - Coordinator

There is currently only one registered provider specialising in providing services to Indigenous clients and currently this service is focused only on allied health services. However, the service indicated that, in time, they may move to providing a broader range of services to people with disability under the NDIS. The challenge will be finding trained Indigenous workers to perform personal and community support services.

For participants, having a choice in services is important. One participant indicated that the opportunity to try new services was one of the best things about the NDIS. Another said that while she liked having a choice she would not change her provider because she struggles with change.

I'm excited about the NDIS because it means I can try new services and meet new people - Participant.

I have stuck with the same provider. I wouldn't change that. I've been there since I was 18. I struggle with change - Participant

Two participants indicated that they have not had the opportunity to exercise choice because they cannot find service providers willing to take them on. One felt it was because her NDIS package was not big enough and therefore services did not feel it was worth it. Another said that service providers in the area were so stretched, they were not returning calls and not willing to take on new customers.

I have an NDIS plan but I haven't been able to use it. I've been refused a service agreement by two services – Participant

It seems like a lot of service providers have their books full – not taking on new people – Participant

Choice in workers

Participants indicated that they generally are offered a choice of workers by their provider.

They introduce me to a few workers and I get to choose - Participant

Some were not happy with some of the people who worked with them but did not ask for a change. According to one advocate, the potential of the NDIS is still not well understood by participants in the LISS area. Service providers also indicated that participants need information and support to exercise choice.

Some aren't good at following up on what he wants to do. All he wants is to do a TAFE course to become a library assistant. But none of the workers are proactive in helping make this happen - Carer

Some are really good but some are not so good – one plays mind games with me – Participant

People with disability always minimise their complaints – they don't want to rock the boat. – Participant

Most customers have low expectations – they're not demanding because they've been underserved for so long – Service provider

The service providers interviewed appeared strongly committed to facilitating choice of workers for participants and were beginning to put processes in place to make this happen.

I thoroughly believe that the more information we can give to our workers and our participants about choice. It's trying to get them thinking that they have a choice – Service provider

If there's a complaint, we have mechanisms to change. It's got to work for them – Service provider

We are talking about putting worker profiles online so people can have a look – Service provider

My biggest concern is matching the worker with the participant. It's more of a challenge. Me being prepared to change workers. Being prepared to follow through – Service provider

Some were concerned about how to offer choice for participants in rural areas or small towns where there are limited numbers of workers. There are issues of privacy to consider in using local workers.

One of the things in small areas is not wanting staff to come from same rural town because everyone knows others business – service provider

Others highlighted some of the difficulties with providing choice including managing the workers' caseloads. Sometimes this might mean referring to other organisations.

When we have a small selection of workers, we have to manage client expectations and worker case load. We can't throw 10 new cases at one person. I think there's a way to negotiate that. We won't connect someone with someone they don't want... you need to be up front with people if you don't have a worker that fits exactly... need to be bold enough and mature enough to refer to other organisations – service provider

Participants in Ipswich highlighted the importance of their workers having similar interests to them and some could not find workers who were enthusiastic about doing the things they were interested in.

There's gaps in Ipswich of workers interested in special areas. Participants struggle to get workers wanting to go to the opera or the cricket with them or camping or boating - Participant

Choice in types of services

Ipswich participants identified a gap in mental health services. This is a specialised area and needs service providers with specialised skills. Two mental health service providers indicated that they are struggling to attract and retain high quality specialist staff as they have had to reduce salaries to align with the NDIS price guide.

Ipswich has lots of service providers for physical and intellectual disability and for younger people but not middle aged people with mental illness – Participant

There's also gaps in service provision re mental illness – it's very specialised and needs particular support workers - Participant

Specific types of services that are said to be in short supply in the region include:

- Assessment services for autism spectrum disorder
- Speech pathology and Occupational Therapy assessments
- Occupational Therapy home and vehicle modifications
- Occupational Therapy services to support mental health
- Psychologists for behavior management

As noted above, Indigenous-specific services were also limited in the area. Shortages in trained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and disability support workers are compounding this issue.

Demand is substantial. We need another (Indigenous-specific) clinic – Service provider

It's difficult to get good psychologists who can do assessments – Service provider

Flexibility in the workforce

The need for a more flexible workforce under the NDIS was well understood by service providers interviewed. They did however highlight challenges in implementing this in terms of rostering, scheduling and maintaining workers' conditions.

The biggest learning is that people need to be flexible. Most important is flexibility. They need to be willing to move around – do short shifts that might turn into long ones – Service provider

If the workforce isn't flexible, the rostering side of thing is an absolute nightmare – Service provider

We definitely need a core and part time and casual staff that can meet the flexibility of people who need access to services outside of normal hours. We know there's a lot more flexibility that's required – our current EB doesn't cater for that – Service provider

In these early stages, we can't offer guarantees for people for work. It will be a problem. – Service provider

There is still work to do to meet the expectations of NDIS participants with regards to flexibility. A number of NDIS participants described situations where they were not able to change their services easily without being charged.

Flexibility is very important – the activity you want to do might change or the time might change or there might be an emergency situation – sometimes you can't give 24 hours' notice - Participant

2. Understanding and attributes

Understanding of the NDIS

LISS service providers demonstrated a strong understanding of the NDIS and what changes were required within their organisations and with their workforces. Service providers from large organisations, particularly

organisations that had services in trial sites in other States or in Townsville, were well prepared and many said they had been implementing NDIS principles for some time.

Being such a large organisation operating in all the trial sites, so over the last few years had a lot of learnings which has helped shaped how we do things – Service provider

We understand very well what we need. We were already doing much of what is required – Service provider

Amongst employees who completed the NDIS workforce survey, most felt they understood the NDIS ‘very well’ or ‘somewhat well’.

Each of the eleven LISS survey respondents felt they needed to improve their understanding about some aspect of the NDIS. The most common areas needing improved understanding were:

- how services are funded/new business models
- the Information, Linkages and Capacity Building (ILC) component of the NDIS
- individualised funding/self directed support approaches
- social insurance concepts and principles
- the planning and review process
- eligibility and access
- the role of Local Area Coordinators (LAC)

Some NDIS participants indicated that their service provider did not understand the NDIS as well as they had hoped; and one was unable to troubleshoot issues for her.

When I asked for help she said ‘I can’t help you’ and couldn’t direct me to anyone who could solve my problem... she needs more skills at that - Participant

Values and skills required

There was strong consistency in what service providers, participants and employees felt were important values and attributes in NDIS workers. The top values and attributes mentioned by employers, employees and participants are listed in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Most important values and personality attributes for NDIS workers

NDIS participants	Service providers	Employees
Listens to me Does what they say they will (reliability) Happy to make changes (flexibility) Does what I ask Has similar interests Has lived experience (eg family member with disability)	Communicates and listens Reliability Similar interests Ethical Has lived experience Shows empathy Cultural fit	Honesty and integrity Good communicator Reliability Flexibility and adaptability Collaborative Accepts individual choices Empathy

An interesting comment from a number of service providers was they are cautious about workers who seem emotionally invested in caring for people as this can result in paternalistic attitudes. The focus needs to be on providing a quality service to the customer.

Another red flag is when people talk incessantly about looking after/caring for people – Service provider

If someone says they're 'passionate' or 'I care', this is a red flag. People need to implement the participant's wishes – Service provider

We want support workers that are passionate about encouraging people who we are supporting to achieve things for themselves – Service provider

People need to have empathy but we're mindful that we don't want a sappy staff member. We want people who can acknowledge that people might be having a hard time but help them move on from that – Service provider

A number of service providers also identified the need to have workers with similar cultural backgrounds to participants. This is particularly important for Indigenous participants.

It's essential to have Aboriginal health workers involved. Someone to feel comfortable with until they develop a relationship with the clinician. I can't express how important that is. – Service provider

There was also a reasonable alignment between the participants and service providers in terms of what skills are required for NDIS workers (see Table 3). Understanding what is required to assist people with different types of disabilities remains important, but the focus is more on supporting the participant to implement their own ideas.

Table 3: Most important skills for NDIS workers

NDIS participants	Service providers	Employees
Understands what help I need	Capacity building	Skill sets for working with particular disabilities
Asks for my ideas	Skill sets for working with particular disabilities	
Stands up for my rights (advocacy)	Customer service	Customer service
Finds things I like to do	IT literacy	IT (using the portal)
Good at organising things	Proactive/uses initiative	Business skills
	Decision-making / risk management	

A common theme across service providers, employees and NDIS participants was that skills are secondary to personal attributes. It doesn't matter if a person has a qualification, the personal values, interests and life experiences of an individual are much more important in finding a good NDIS worker.

We've very quickly adopted attitude that it doesn't matter if person has experience or Cert IV. We look for passion and some life experience. Certificate courses don't teach a person how to work with people – Service provider

Skills can be learnt. We're looking for things that can't be taught - cultural fit, ethics, values – Service provider

It's about getting better at matching. We need to move away from the mindset that they must have a qualification – Service provider

The staff I've got are those that totally engage with the person. That's personality. That's what I look at. They can give me a folder full of certificates but I'm looking at the person – Service provider

The Certificate III is not important – it's too generic – it's not needed at all. Pieces of paper mean nothing when you've got no experience - Carer

3. Pathways and career opportunities

Pathways

The main reason LISS region employees said they decided to work in the disability sector was because they liked working with people. The second most important reason was because they wanted to make a difference in people's lives.

Similar to the situation in Mackay, LISS service providers are beginning to look outside the disability sector for workers. The need for experience or a qualification in the industry is less important now than having the right personality or similar interests to participants. Life experience, rather than disability experience is the applicant's currency.

We're looking for experience from all different walks of life – employment, sport, IT, retail. People who are dynamic in their role and can change according to people they work with – Service provider

If there's no one within the organisation with the right interests we go and look for people. We might talk to an archery range to find someone who might be interested in working with someone who likes archery – those sorts of enquiries might yield someone – Service provider

If someone's got an interest in history or museums. I want to match a worker with similar interests. That is that worker truly engaging with the participants – Service provider

This focus on interests over skills was confirmed in conversations with participants. Participants do not want support workers who don't want to engage in the same activities. They want to spend time with workers who have a genuine interest in similar things.

The most important thing about his support workers is that they have similar interests. Unless they have this they won't create communication, then they can't create education or independence - Participant

I won't open up to people without similar interests - Participant

People that want to do what I want to do - Participant

Some support workers just sit down on their phones - Participant

While LISS service providers are looking for people from a range of industries, they are cautious about taking on people with an aged care background. Employers feel that people who have worked in the aged care industry generally have the wrong mindset for the disability industry – aged care is a caring mindset, rather than a customer service or capacity building mindset. This issue was raised in Mackay consultations, but was a particularly strong theme in LISS.

Often people working in aged care for any period of time struggle to adopt person centred model. Often, they are care workers – doing things for people – making lives easier. But what we want from support workers is to motivate people to do things themselves. It's almost the complete opposite view – Service provider

Some things cross over like medications and showers, but that environment is more about caring for. We want support workers that are passionate about encouraging people who we are supporting to achieve things for themselves - Service provider

In another service, we tried to use people across (disability and aged care) services but it worked out badly every time. In aged care, it's 'I'll help you', 'I'm here to take care of you' – instead of 'how do I assist while ensuring you sit in the driver's seat of your life'. Aged care workers set bar quite low, out of respect, they want to make lives easier. This doesn't translate into mental health or disability. – Service provider

One of the things that is the kiss of death is if someone has worked in aged care. You really can't untrain that. It's a very medical model. I don't know why older people tolerate that. For people who've worked in aged care or government group homes, they don't get it. It's never ended well – Service provider

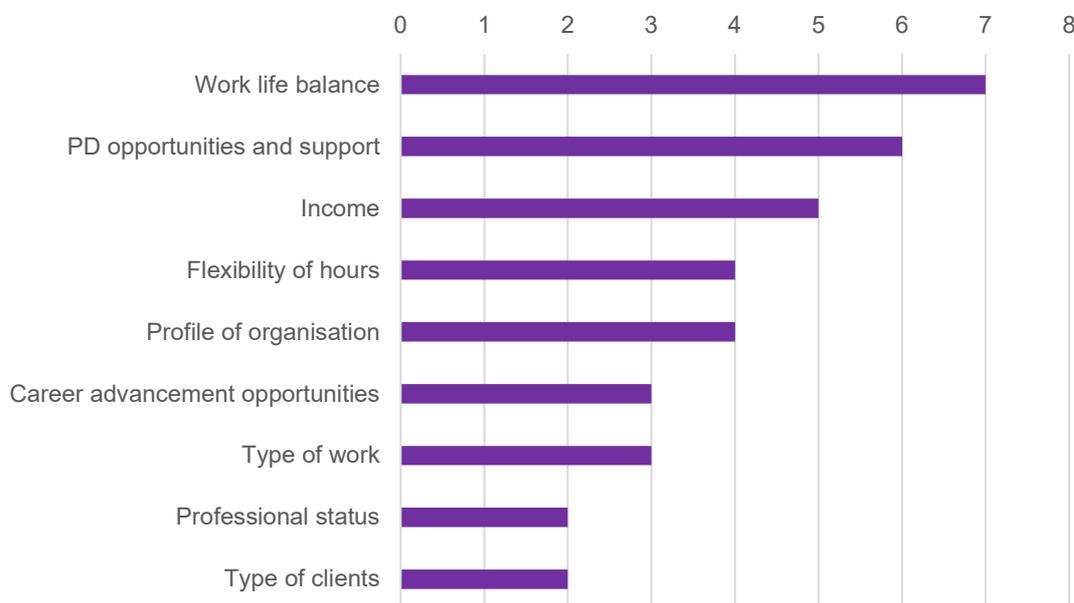
We're still attracting healthcare workers and community services workers from aged care – that's the trap we're falling into. But that is not close to the skill set we need – Service provider

Career opportunities

Half of the survey respondents were satisfied or very satisfied with the career advancement opportunities available to them. The other half were neutral or dissatisfied. Only half the survey respondents agreed with the statement “I am aware of different career pathways in NDIS work”.

When asked about the important factors in career choices for employees, ‘work life balance’ was most important, followed by ‘professional development opportunities and support’ (see Figure 1). Work-life balance also came out as number one amongst Mackay employees. ‘Career advancement opportunities’ and ‘type of work’ were considered moderately important by most respondents.

Figure 1: Very important factors in career choices



The employee poll indicated that some staff members are concerned about the casualisation of the workforce and pay drops for staff, particularly mental health support workers. This is affecting career satisfaction.

Workforce Wizard data confirms that casual employment in the disability sector has been growing substantially. For four consecutive quarters, the casual workforce growth rate was much higher than the permanent workforce growth rate, both nationally and in Queensland, but Queensland has a higher proportion of casual employment than the national average.^{iv}

Despite concern about casualisation, most of those surveyed expect to stay in the industry for five or more years.

4. Numbers of workers and applicants

Numbers of workers

The local workforce data collected through the Workforce Wizard tool administered by NDS is still fairly limited. Given that use of Workforce Wizard relies on organisations to ‘opt-in’, data was only available in relation to two

organisations and 223 workers in the Ipswich region at the time of finalising this report. Nevertheless, these organisations provide case studies of where some pressure points might be emerging.

In the year June 2016 to June 2017, workforce numbers in these two organisations have increased by 42% from 157 to 223 workers. This is consistent with service provider advice that they have all been undertaking recruitment activities in recent months to prepare for the NDIS. There were particular increases in numbers of people in the under 25 and the 25-44 year age groups in the two organisations for which data was available.

The data indicates that only 21% of the workforces in these two organisations are male. This is slightly better than the Mackay gender split (17% male) but there is still some way to go to create disability workforces that reflect the community they serves.

Seventy-eight percent of the workforces in these two organisations are casual. This is up from 62% a year ago. Only nine percent of employees are permanent full time. This indicates a significant increase in casualisation and reflects discussions with service providers who are looking for more flexibility in the workforce. On average, workers are working for 21.38 hours a week. This figure has been fluctuating over time but there appears to be a trend of decreasing average weekly hours over the last 18 months.

Number of suitable applicants

Some service providers have struggled to find well-suited candidates for vacant positions and there is an interest in finding new ways to sort through the large number of applicants to find people who would make the best match for their customers. Traditional recruitment practices take too long – participants may take their business elsewhere if the right worker is not available quickly - and these approaches don't always surface attributes that are important for particular clients.

When we advertise it takes weeks and weeks. Under the old way of operating might be 3 months before they start. Some participants will not wait around that process – Service provider

We've had trouble with recruitment – finding the right people and skill sets – Service provider

For support worker positions, we get lots of applications – its very time-consuming to go through. We might get 40-50 applications. Only five or six get through the phone screen to employ one or two – Service provider

It's a very long process and it can be easy to miss really good people. We can't blame the applicant if we fail to see their attributes.... It's never going to be a one size fits all – Service provider

In the mental health area, organisations have had trouble recruiting because they are offering a lower pay rate than in the past. Workers are leaving the industry or taking up government positions if they have higher level skills. Positions such as support coordinator and lifestyle planner, are proving particularly difficult to fill because the roles do not pay as well as the NDIA, government or the LAC and there is a perception that career pathways are limited in community organisations.

The biggest thing will be the higher-level skill sets – support coordinator, lifestyle planner. There's limited career pathways. To a certain degree, we are drawing from the government sector which pays so much more. Why would I do lifestyle planner at that level when I earned \$20K more at disability services – Service provider

Some organisations favour referrals from families or other staff members over HR processes where personality attributes are harder to ascertain.

We don't have an HR department –we're not bound by centralised recruitment process. When you score people for positions you might lose people who might be good – Service provider

One organisation has developed an 'attributional tool' which is a mechanism for assessing the skills and aptitudes of workers to undertake certain role. This tool is an online test which is proving effective for finding people who are a good fit for NDIS work in the mental health space and helping applicants see where they need development in order to be considered suitable for a job.

School leavers have been identified as an untapped recruitment pool. While providers prefer staff with some life experience, this does not necessarily preclude school leavers, particularly those with family members with disability. Young participants, looking for staff with similar interests, will increasingly be requesting young support workers. There are some obstacles for young applicants, particularly the need to have a driver's license and often a car, and to be insured to transport people.

School leavers are valuable but they often have limited availability, and may not have an insured vehicle, so can't do transport – Service provider

I'd be interested in school leavers – traditionally we haven't. There are a number of young people coming through with plans who will want young people for support – Service provider

NDIS participants also pointed out that people with family members with disability make very good support workers and that university students are another good recruitment source, as they will usually be willing to stay around for three or four years until they complete their studies.

Support workers who have family members with disability are the best support workers because they already know and understand what is required. This should be a target group to look at for WorkAbility – Participant

University students are a good source of labour – there is an untapped uni student market – they stay around for 3 years – Service provider

The need for a flexible and casual workforce is creating challenges for employers. Some service providers have existing enterprise agreements that do not offer the level of flexibility required in an NDIS business environment. Others are concerned the quality of work will be affected because they need to offer lower pay rates in line with the NDIS price guide.

Once you're offering \$46 an hour, your service is losing \$11 an hour - Service provider

I'm concerned that we can't pay level 4 workers anymore. Its undercutting the quality of the service. We're just about to see it. There will be people hurt – Service provider

5. Training and understanding skill gaps

Understanding skill gaps

As noted above, it was universally acknowledged amongst LISS stakeholders that the skills and qualifications of NDIS workers were secondary to personal attributes. Nevertheless, there were areas where service providers believe specific training is required. The most commonly mentioned areas were:

- Decision making and risk management – with an increasingly mobile and casualised workforce, workers will have less access to supervision and need to make high level decisions and assess risk independently.
- IT literacy – workers are increasingly using technology, including the NDIS portal, and assisting participants to navigate the NDIS portal. All workers need a reasonable level of IT literacy.
- Capacity-building – as an insurance scheme, the NDIS requires workers to be able to assist participants builds skills and independence over time. This is different from many previous models which were focused only on providing support.

- Communication with families – in the past, support workers were not necessarily required to communicate with families.
- Innovation and creativity – coming up with new and different ways to assist participants
- Business skills – these skills are important for sole traders and small businesses, particularly allied health professionals who are not trained in business skills
- Matching and rostering – these roles have become very important and more complex. Specific, high level skills are required

More than looking at rosters you have to understand employment standards, legislation. You've got to be all over discussions with unions and expectations in enterprise agreements. You've got to have really good people skills. Be able to ask people to come to work without notice, to build positive relationships with people – it's a very complex role. Very challenging – Service provider

One organisation is looking to actively mitigate the risks of having a more casualised, mobile workforce by implementing structured opportunities for professional supervision and reflection with peers.

The biggest risk in a casualised workforce is communicating ethics and values without regular team meetings. Organisationally we might have a mentoring or supervision role, community of practice – opportunities to connect- not just be a free-lancer. We need to treat workers as an asset. If we treat them that way they will stay – Service provider

Employees who were surveyed generally felt that they had the skills they needed to do their jobs and only occasionally or rarely felt out of their depth. Respondents felt particularly confident about their organisational skills. The most common skills workers felt they could develop to improve their performance were:

- Conflict and issue resolution skills, and
- Assisting people plan and make informed choices

Availability, accessibility and quality of training

Like in Mackay, LISS service providers are concerned that tighter margins under the NDIS means there is little budget left over for training.

LISS service providers felt there were plenty of RTOs in the area who were willing to provide training when and where they needed it. It is sometimes hard for service providers to find the best trainers, as not all are high quality. Having a good relationship with a quality RTO is important for businesses.

Trainers have been very very good so far. We can change if they don't work out – Service provider

There are definitely pockets of exceptional trainers. Finding those RTOs is invaluable to any service provider. You need a good strong relationship with the best RTO in your region. – Service provider

LISS residents interested in training in the disability support field have a range of options in and around the region. The TAFE Bundamba, Springfield and Inala campuses offers Certificate IV in Disability, Certificate III in Individual Support and the Diploma in Community Services. There are also private providers in Ipswich, Gatton and Boonah that offer Certificate III in Individual Support.^v The Certificate III in Individual Support is government-subsidised and attracted the fifth highest number of commencing students in Queensland in 2016 (3,735 students) of all qualifications^{vi}.

The University of Southern Queensland in Ipswich offers Bachelor level course in Health and Social Wellbeing which equips students to become leaders within the health care sector and meet future demands and requirements due to the introduction of the NDIS. The university has also recently developed a Graduate

Certificate of Business (NDIS studies) which will be on offer from 2018. This course is aimed at managers working in the disability sector to provide them with skills to understand regulations within the NDIS, ethical practice, decision making, leadership and management and legislative policy and practice related to disability services. It articulates to a Graduate Diploma and Master of Business or Project Management. The course is offered at Springfield and Toowoomba campuses.

6. Strength and sustainability of the Network

The LISS Network began with about 50 members, of which about half were service providers. The Network has dubbed itself a 'Working Party' because it aims to be focused on action.

Once the NDIS roll-out commenced, attendance at Working Party meetings dropped off significantly, with organisations under significant pressure to on-board new customers. Around 10 stakeholders continue to meet monthly to network, discuss progress with the action plan and respond to emerging issues.

Other LISS stakeholders continue to engage with WorkAbility in other ways, specifically through the projects that have been implemented to address workforce needs in the area.

The standout project in the LISS region is the Jobs Roadshow. As noted above, the Roadshow is a process that brings together service providers, RTOs and Job Actives with jobseekers as a way of matching potential workers to jobs and training. About 12 service providers have been participating in this activity.

Ten sessions of the Roadshow have been delivered so far, with approximately 700 job seekers participating in 'Speed interviews' and expressing their desire to work in the industry. The Network aims to extend the process to include university students. NDIS service providers are hoping to attract interest from students of social and health related studies.

This Roadshow has produced sustainable partnerships between stakeholders. Some service providers now have formalised relationships with Job Actives that they connected with through the Roadshow process. Service providers have also been working proactively with Roadshow RTOs to develop Pre-employment and Induction training for Roadshow jobseekers.

The Working Party is working towards implementing a number of other activities in coming months including:

- Developing a recruitment roadmap: The working party will gather information from service providers, job actives and RTOs on recruitment approaches, training options and funding and subsidy opportunities for dissemination across the ecosystem. The document will provide simplified information on the processes for joining the disability sector and onboarding staff.
- Common Induction Program: The working party is in the process of identifying common elements of organisations' induction process and creating an induction program which will be relevant to all service providers. They are also identifying a funding stream to deliver the induction program to new recruits at little or no cost to service providers.
- HR training workshops: Training to upskill service managers to engage in the HR process.

Ongoing engagement with the employment sector, through Job Actives at the local level, and Department of Employment at the regional and strategic level is important for continued success in building a quality workforce.

After some initial difficulties connecting with and receiving information from the local NDIA and Local Area Coordinator in the early stages of the rollout, the WorkAbility network has begun working constructively with the LAC, including developing a joint workshop for service providers on the planning process.

Regular meetings with the WorkAbility project team has been useful for the Ipswich Coordinator as a way of testing ideas and hearing how other regions are dealing with issues. The South-East Queensland team meetings are also a valuable way to leverage activities throughout the region.

By the end of the 12-month funding period, the Coordinator, working with the LISS Working Party, hopes to have:

- Created some real actionable tools and processes for getting people into the industry
- Dispelled myths about disability work
- Assisted service providers to move to a stronger customer focus
- Assisted stakeholders to develop sustainable partnerships and share information to ensure there are enough of the right workers in the region

The key to cohesiveness of the network is being heavy on service providers and having the most relevant information - Coordinator

WorkAbility network members hope the WorkAbility network will help provide guidance on building a suitable workforce, implement strategies about getting the right workers into the industry, help dispel myths about disability work and reframe paternalistic attitudes to service provision.

WorkAbility needs to reinvent the story – people with disability now have the resources to do things in the community. These resources can be used to give you a job that makes you feel good – but you don't need to 'care'.

Considerations for WorkAbility Queensland implementation

Positive developments

There is a common understanding of attributes required of workers

Key worker attributes of reliability, flexibility, listening and having similar interests are being articulated by participants, employers and employees alike. Employers are beginning to look outside the disability sector for staff from sport, IT and retail to find people with these attributes.

Some service providers are implementing new tools (such as the AfterCare 'attributional tool') or recruitment approaches (such as preferencing personal recommendations) to ensure they find the right workers for their customers. Others, however, are still struggling with traditional recruitment approaches that are too time consuming for a customer-driven system and may not unearth the best matches.

Opportunities for young people with personal experience

There is an opportunity to focus more on school-leavers. This is not a traditional focus of disability sector recruitment. However, participants are beginning to ask for younger workers. Life experience in supporting friends or family members with disability is a highly-regarded attribute for young recruits.

Service providers are improving their processes to enhance participant choices

Service providers are willing to go to some lengths to ensure they can match participants to the right workers, including focussing on personality and interests, rather than skills, encouraging participants to have multiple providers and in some cases referring to other service providers if they do not have a suitable worker.

There are opportunities to build a culture of collaboration between providers to ensure participants are matched with the right worker and right service. This will also ensure participants are not being overlooked when the service provider they contact is unwilling or unable to take on new participants.

The local network is engaged and action-focused with the right mix of stakeholders

The LISS Network is highly action focussed and has developed a number of programs in direct response to the needs of the region. Sustainable partnerships are forming as a result of collaborative work on the action plan.

The local network has developed a highly successful recruitment program which could be applied in other regions

The Jobs Roadshow developed by the LISS working party is filling recruitment gaps in the region by bringing together employers, RTOs, Job Actives and jobseekers. With the imminent closure of an abattoir and a chicken processing factory in Ipswich, there will be an extra 750 new jobseekers in the region. The Roadshow model could work well to move a proportion of these workers to jobs in the NDIS sector.

A new focus for the Roadshow on local university students studying human services is likely to yield quality recruits to fill the need for younger workers and for workers that are looking for a long-term future in the industry.

Challenges and risks

Casualisation of the workforce

Employers are challenged by enterprise agreements being counter to need for highly casualised workforce and the pressure on pay rates under NDIS pricing (particularly in mental health sector).

Employers are also challenged by maintaining engagement and commitment in mobile, casualised workforce and are legitimately concerned about the increased turnover. This problem is evident in recent Workforce Wizard data which show a 6.6% turnover rate for Queensland casual disability support workers versus a 3.7% turnover rate for permanent workers.^{vii}

As well as being costly for the organisation, high turnover has an effect on the consistency of support provided to participants. Participants have indicated are looking for workers who can stay with them for many years.

Service providers that find new ways to provide support to casual workers and opportunities for reflective practice and supervision will likely become employers of choice for workers and providers of choice for participants.

Matching and rostering

Matching and rostering is a complex role which requires high level skills and knowledge about employment standards, legislation and building positive relationships with staff. Systems are also needed to capture relevant data on staff to ensure matches can be made based on similar interests, as requested by participants.

Aged care backgrounds often not a good fit

According to both participants and service providers, healthcare workers and aged care workers generally do not have the right skill set for the NDIS. There is some cross-over but the focus for NDIS workers needs to be on supporting capacity and maximising independence, in keeping with the NDIS principles, rather than providing 'care'.

Support in identifying high quality training will be valued

There is some concern about the quality of training providers in the region. Some are exceptional but, according to service providers, others are delivering a low-quality service. The RTO relationship is very important, both as a recruitment channel and to ensure relevant, quality staff training. Support in identifying high quality trainers and matching them with service providers would be valued.

Skill development needed in new areas

This research has identified a number of areas where skill development is required including decision making and risk management, IT literacy, capacity-building of participants, communication with families, innovation and creativity, business skills and matching and rostering.

Higher level positions hard to fill

Higher level positions e.g. support coordinator or lifestyle planner, are particularly hard to fill. People with these skills were previously employed in government positions and organisations cannot offer same pay level under NDIS. Organisations may need to look at approaches for identifying and upskilling career-motivated support workers to assist them to move into higher level positions. The new Graduate Certificate of Business (NDIS studies) being offered through the University of Southern Queensland from 2018 will be valuable for upskilling this cohort.

Indigenous health workers

Aboriginal people are not signing up to the NDIS at the same rate as non-Indigenous Australians. A key factor for this relates to the availability of the right workers and service providers. Research about access to the NDIS has found 'choices about the Aboriginality of their support workers was a factor in maintaining the service participation of Aboriginal people'. It also found there is 'a culture of mistrust of non-Aboriginal generic agencies in Aboriginal communities' and 'trust was identified as a major access barrier to disability service providers for Aboriginal people'.^{viii}

In LISS, there are only a few Indigenous-specific NDIS service providers. As more Indigenous participants enter the scheme, there will be pressure on the existing service providers. Many Indigenous participants may wish to choose an Indigenous worker and there will be a need for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers, cultural liaison officers, care coordinators, Local Area Coordinators to facilitate relationships with non-Indigenous therapists and coordinate support.

Importance of work-life balance for workers

In both Mackay and LISS, work-life balance rated as the most important factor amongst NDIS workers in choosing a job. In an increasingly casualised workforce, work-life balance is under threat.

Part-time and casual work has been associated with lower work-life balance. Most casual job arrangements do not qualify for basic employment conditions such as working-time arrangements, minimum wages, sick leave, holiday loadings, and the right to collective representation.^{ix} Organisations may need to look at how their employment practices facilitate work-life balance to ensure they can hold on to their workers.

Conclusion

The WorkAbility Queensland Strategy in LISS has made good headway in a short time. Targeted, practical initiatives are helping boost the NDIS workforce and generate sustainable partnerships. Many service providers are moving to recruitment approaches based on interests and attributes, which is exactly what participants are asking for. The research has revealed a number of emerging challenges for the region in securing the right workforce to meet demand, including fostering commitment and value-based decision making in an increasingly mobile and casualised workforce; developing skills and processes in matching and rostering to provide more flexible services; and filling emerging skill gaps such as Indigenous workers and higher level coordinators. Also,

care needs to be taken in conflating the aged care and disability workforces as aged care training and experience does not easily translate to the NDIS. This research has provided some important messages to consider in implementing the local initiatives in Central and South-East Queensland in the final year of WorkAbility Queensland.

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