WorkAbility Queensland Evaluation

Stage 3 Report

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Executive summary

Introduction

WorkAbility Qld is the non-government 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. It has been operating since 2016.

An evaluation of the strategy is progressing in four stages. This is the report for Stage 3 of the evaluation. It compares progress on indicators measured in 2017, drawing on data from the two case study regions. It also details achievements and areas where a continued focus is needed to support the NDIS workforce in Queensland.

Key achievements

Key achievements of the strategy in the first three years of implementation have been:

- Quickly building a strong and trusted brand in Queensland regions, and with Federal and State government departments

- Building relationships between the right stakeholders and effectively brokering partnerships between different programs and organisations involved in employment and training for the NDIS workforce

- Delivering practical job outcomes and raising interest in the industry through disability careers expos and job roadshows

- Using place-based coordinators to customise approaches to local regions and contribute 'just in time' intelligence on regional workforce needs

- Leadership by four established industry organisations, bringing different perspectives and combining intelligence and stakeholder reach.

- Designing and implementing a social media campaign which has the potential to dispel myths about disability work, an ongoing challenge for the industry

- Securing government support to undertake a comprehensive training strategy for the industry

- Developing a solid evidence base for ongoing research, strategy and policy work

Challenges

Challenges faced by the strategy include:

- Building sustainability in regional areas within twelve-month timeframes

- Managing administrative arrangements between consortium members and ensuring communication with and support for regional team members

- Embedding agreed outcome indicators and data collection processes in every activity

- Articulating a clear role and communicating this to all stakeholders

Focus for the future

WorkAbility Qld's focus moving forward should be on the following areas:

1. Supporting the development of the independent contractor workforce

2. Strategies for staff retention

3. Using the National Training Skills and Support Strategy to implement training priorities identified in this evaluation

4. Strategies for employment of people with disability in NDIS work, including through DES's and social enterprises

5. A workforce to support Indigenous service provision, particularly in rural and remote areas

6. A workforce to support CALD communities

7. Continuing 'myth-busting' activities

8. Developing the allied health workforce in the regions

9. Promoting work placements as recruitment channel

10. Addressing blue and yellow card processing delays

11. Linking with related Commonwealth initiatives, particularly the Boosting the Local Care Workforce project

12. Reviewing the administration and governance structure to consider a streamlined advisory structure, inclusion of a voice for NDIS participant employers on the consortium and better data collection and monitoring of outcomes

13. Ensuring sustainability activities and efforts beyond the life of the core funding agreement

Introduction

WorkAbility Qld is the non-government 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 participant need and demand under the NDIS.

A key aspect of the work of WorkAbility Qld to date has been to establish local NDIS workforce networks (or ecosystems), supported by a local coordinator, in each of the 13 Queensland NDIS regions to develop and drive a workforce action plan for the region. The local networks are supported by governance, funding, research and strategy and marketing activities which are managed at a statewide level.

WorkAbility Qld is overseen by a Steering Committee comprising senior representatives from the consortium, being, at the time of writing, 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 WorkAbility Qld strategy to assess the effectiveness of the strategy and to provide information which will assist the Steering Committee to make future policy, program and investment decisions in relation to the NDIS workforce.

The evaluation is progressing in four 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 Lockyer Valley, Ipswich, Scenic Rim and Somerset (the LISS region). The reports for this stage of the evaluation were completed in mid-2017.

Stage 3: Follow-up on the baseline data collection by collecting outcome data of achievements after 9-12 months of implementation of WorkAbility Qld in the case study regions, including sourcing and synthesising a range of secondary data sources to understand the community level impacts of the strategy. This stage is due for completion in July 2018.

Stage 4: Review of implementation approaches taken in WorkAbility Qld incorporating South-East Queensland and Far North Queensland and state-wide impact of the program over the four years of funding. This stage will be completed in June 2019.

This is the report for Stage 3 of the evaluation. It compares progress on indicators measured in 2017, drawing on data from the two case study regions, as well as details of achievements and areas for continued focus to support the NDIS workforce in Queensland.
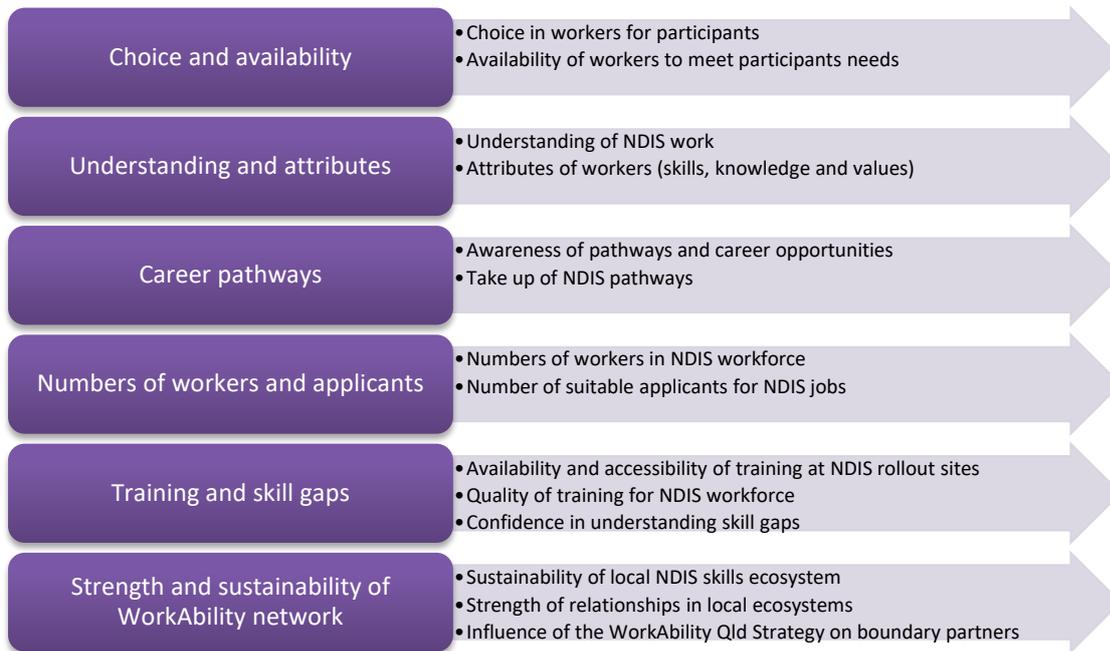
Methodology

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 Qld theory of change was developed with the WorkAbility Qld Management Group and agreed by the Steering Committee in October 2016. It 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 outlined in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: WorkAbility Qld evaluation themes and indicators

Choice and availability	• Choice in workers for participants • Availability of workers to meet participants needs
Understanding and attributes	• Understanding of NDIS work • Attributes of workers (skills, knowledge and values)
Career pathways	• Awareness of pathways and career opportunities • Take up of NDIS pathways
Numbers of workers and applicants	• Numbers of workers in NDIS workforce • Number of suitable applicants for NDIS jobs
Training and skill gaps	• Availability and accessibility of training at NDIS rollout sites • Quality of training for NDIS workforce • Confidence in understanding skill gaps
Strength and sustainability of WorkAbility network	• Sustainability of local NDIS skills ecosystem • Strength of relationships in local ecosystems • Influence of the WorkAbility Qld Strategy on boundary partners

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 used the 14 evaluation indicators to consider the experience in two WorkAbility Qld sites in the early stages of NDIS implementation. This data formed a baseline from which to look at progress made by the WorkAbility Qld strategy in Stage 3 of the evaluation, nine to twelve months later.

Data collection

The following methods were used in both LISS and Mackay regions for Stages 2 and 3 of the evaluation:

i) Observations and conversations with the local Network – The evaluator attended local network meetings, presented information about the evaluation and had group discussions and discussions with individual network members about their expectations and processes related to WorkAbility Qld. These conversations also provided an opportunity to secure commitment to the evaluation from local stakeholders and support in recruiting participants.

ii) Interviews with Coordinators –semi-structured interviews with each local WorkAbility Qld Coordinator provided insights into how the local networks operate, activities conducted, progress towards goals and challenges for the project.

iii) Participant interviews – 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 at each stage. A $30 store voucher was offered to interview participants as a gesture of thanks for their time and contribution.

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 Qld Networks and industry bodies, including NDS, CSIA and QCOSS. The Stage 3 version of the survey was cut back significantly to improve the response rate.

In LISS for Stage 2, 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.

In LISS for Stage 3, the employer interviews were supplemented by a session held at a service provider forum coordinated by the local council.

vi) Secondary data analysis – This involved analysing workforce profiles prepared by coordinators at each site, information collected from service providers through NDS's Workforce Wizard platform, Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and university enrolment data, information about RTO and university offerings and other workforce data.

In addition, for Stage 3 of the evaluation, interviews were held with WorkAbility Qld 'boundary partners' to assess effectiveness of statewide processes. These are the groups and organisations with which the strategy interacts directly and anticipates opportunities to influence and they include key local council partners, Local Area Coordinator (LAC) staff and/or National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) staff; government officers from departments involved with WorkAbility Qld and disability advocates. Stage 3 also included interviews with each of the four members of the WorkAbility Qld consortium. The data from consortium members and boundary partner interviews will also be used to inform stage 4 of the evaluation.

Evaluation participants

A total of 142 individuals contributed to the baseline stage of the evaluation and 133 individuals contributed to stage 3 of the evaluation. The response rate was higher in LISS than in Mackay, mostly because LISS is a more highly populated area with a larger NDIS ecosystem. However, the number of people who provided feedback individually (i.e. through interviews or surveys, rather than local network discussions) was similar in both locations. Table 1 below details how many respondents contributed to each method.

Table 1: Evaluation participants

Method	Stage 2: Baseline		Stage 3: Outcomes		
	Mackay	*LISS*	*Mackay*	*LISS*	*Statewide*
Local Network focus group	9	49	-	-	-
Participant interviews	10	8	7	9	-
Employee survey/poll	27	19	2	5	40
Employer interviews	10	8	8	5	-
Employer focus group	-	-		30	-
Boundary partner interviews	-	-	3	6	13
Project team members (incl. local coordinators)	1	1	1	1	4
Total	*57*	*85*	*21*	*55*	*57*

Analysis

Qualitative data from interviews and focus groups was analysed using content analysis. All notes were transcribed and then interrogated for patterns and themes relating to the 14 indicators.

Quantitative data from surveys was analysed for frequencies (counts), rather than means because the numbers of survey responses was fairly low.

Secondary data sources were mined for relevant qualitative and quantitative data which could support, explain or present a different perspective on any of the fourteen indicators.

All data was triangulated to understand whether they yielded similar results to improve the reliability of the findings.

Findings

Overview of WorkAbility Qld structure and activities

WorkAbility Qld was established in 2016 to provide a concerted response to the emerging NDIS workforce needs. The consortium of four industry stakeholders was funded by the Department of Communities under a consortium agreement to design and implement a strategy to build supply and capability in the NDIS workforce. See Figure 2 below.

This approach to workforce development is innovative on a number of levels:

- It is designed, managed and implemented by a consortium of industry players, with Government participating in a funding and supportive capacity

- It uses a 'skills eco-system' model whereby all relevant stakeholders within an industry are brought together in a coordinated network to address skill and labour supply issues[1]

- The skills eco-system approach drives the strategy at the strategic level through a Stewardship Group and a Statewide Advisory Group and this approach is mirrored at the regional level through local WorkAbility Qld networks leading place-based activity

- Each consortium partner takes the lead on projects aligned with their strengths and networks and is accountable to the consortium for achieving quality outcomes within agreed timeframes.

Figure 3 illustrates the projects which WorkAbility Qld are currently contracted to deliver.
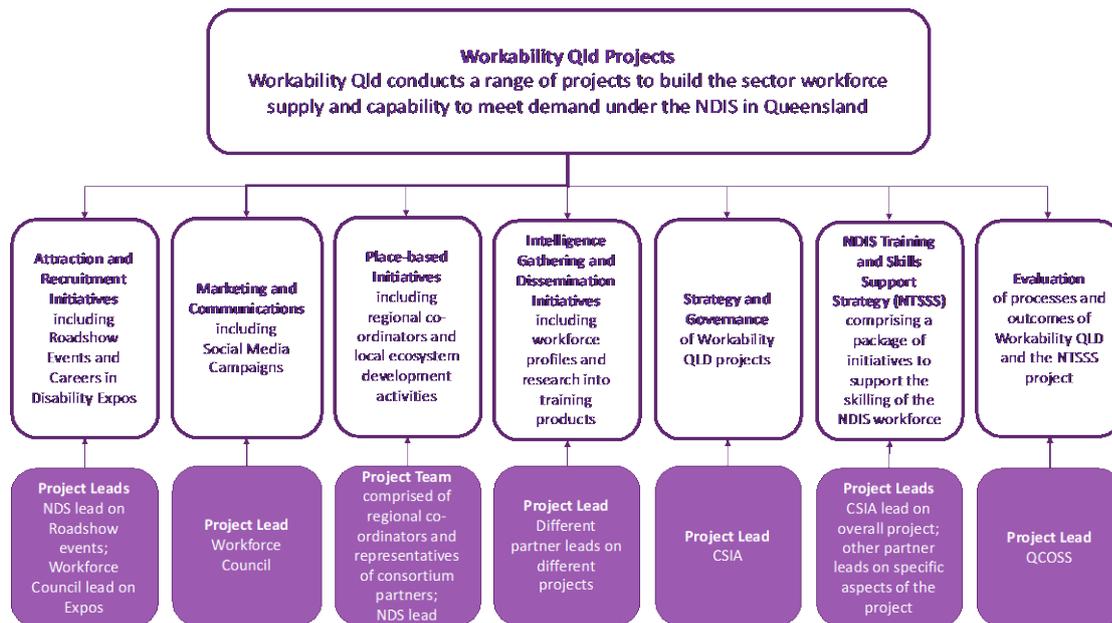
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[1] With a skill ecosystem approach, stakeholders are committed to addressing a broad agenda rather than narrow business interests. This means balancing the diverse and sometimes conflicting interests of small, medium and big business, managers and employees, as well as job-seekers and the wider local communities. For more information see Windsor, K. (2008). Skills in Context: A guide to the skills ecosystem approach to workforce development. Report for NSW Dept of Education and Training.

Figure 2: WorkAbility Qld Structure

Consortium Partners

WORKFORCE COUNCIL   NDS National Disability Services   CSIA Community Services Industry Alliance   QCOSS Queensland Council of Social Service

Workability Qld is comprised of four industry partner organisations, conducting NDIS workforce development activities under a Consortium Agreement

Stewardship Group
Comprised of representatives of the QLD and Commonwealth Governments and Consortium Partners, the Stewardship Group identifies strategic opportunities and coordinates sector and government activities

Project Steering Group
Comprised of the CEOs of the four partner organisations, the Steering Group has governance and strategic oversight of Workability Qld

Statewide Advisory Group
Comprised of representatives of the sector and of Government, the Advisory Group provides strategic and workforce intelligence advice to Workability Qld

Management Team
Comprised of Managers from each of the four partner organisations, the Management Team drives the implementation of Workability Qld activities

Project Leads
Each consortium partner takes the 'lead' on particular Workability Qld projects, often building operational project teams to implement them

Figure 3: WorkAbility Qld Projects 2016 - 2018

Workability Qld Projects
Workability Qld conducts a range of projects to build the sector workforce supply and capability to meet demand under the NDIS in Queensland

Attraction and Recruitment Initiatives including Roadshow Events and Careers in Disability Expos

Marketing and Communications including Social Media Campaigns

Place-based Initiatives including regional co-ordinators and local ecosystem development activities

Intelligence Gathering and Dissemination Initiatives including workforce profiles and research into training products

Strategy and Governance of Workability QLD projects

NDIS Training and Skills Support Strategy (NTSSS) comprising a package of initiatives to support the skilling of the NDIS workforce

Evaluation of processes and outcomes of Workability QLD and the NTSSS project

Project Leads NDS lead on Roadshow events; Workforce Council lead on Expos

Project Lead Workforce Council

Project Team comprised of regional co-ordinators and representatives of consortium partners; NDS lead

Project Lead Different partner leads on different projects

Project Lead CSIA

Project Leads CSIA lead on overall project; other partner leads on specific aspects of the project

Project Lead QCOSS

Progress against indicators

1. Choice and availability of workers

Choice in providers and service types

In mid-2017…

When the baseline report was prepared, the NDIS was in the very early stages of roll-out in case study locations. Most participants were already receiving services and had continued with existing service providers. Medium and large providers were dominating the market. NDIS-registered allied health services, particularly specialised services, were in short supply. Specific services for Indigenous participants were also undeveloped.

At this time, the WorkAbility Qld networks had made little inroads into addressing needs outside the bigger centres in each region in the early stages of implementation. The focus was on preparing services that would be transitioning high numbers of clients. There was a recognition that choices in outer areas of the regions would be limited and strategies would be needed to ensure participants had options to choose from.

Participant choice and control is central to the NDIS and in the baseline study NDIS participants had indicated that having a choice in services was important to them, and something they valued about the NDIS model, but many had not yet had the opportunity to exercise choice.

In mid-2018…

The provider market in Queensland has grown and diversified.

As at 31 December 2017, there were 2,875 registered NDIS providers in Queensland, which was a 23% increase on the previous quarter.[2] However, there is still little or no choice of providers for participants outside the major centres. Queensland has much lower than anticipated levels of participation in the NDIS (only 56% of the expected number of plans have been approved) and nearly half of funding for supports has not been spent by participants. This underutilisation rate is higher in Queensland than most other states.[3] Respondents to this evaluation advise that the underutilisation rate is largely due to the lack of services available, particularly outside the major centres. Allied health services and mental health services stood out as major areas of need in both Ipswich and Mackay.   Allied health services, and household services including builders, cleaners and lawn-mowers have not registered with the NDIS in the numbers needed, and some are de-registering due to red-tape.

> *"There's nothing in Whitsundays or Moranbah. Nothing! No clinicians. We can't set up services because we can't recruit in the region" – Service provider*

> *"A number of therapists have de-registered due to red tape for registration and the NDIA often ignores their reports or makes their own value judgements. Why would they bother?" – Service provider*

> *"Of all the builders who were registered, there's only one left in Ipswich. Quotes get lost, not approved, they're asked to requote. People need to use their time productively to survive." – Service provider*

The NDIS participants confirmed that there continues to be long waits and very little choice for allied health services (particularly occupational therapy) and home assistance such as cleaning and gardening delivered professionally at a price that was affordable within an NDIS package. In Mackay, housing and transport services were also said to be in short supply.

> *"My budget could not afford a private cleaner. Many charge $50 an hour with a minimum of 3 hours for a professional job" – Participant*

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[2] COAG Disability Reform Council Performance Report – Queensland 31 March 2018
[3] COAG Disability Reform Council Performance Report – Queensland 31 March 2018

"There's only one OT who is NDIS registered in this town. She can take up to 4 months to get to you. A friend uses an OT in Townsville but you're paying for her to get here and back again" - Participant

"Service providers are not responsive, I've been ringing and sending emails to get services and they don't get back to me" - Participant

"The OT said she'd get me a new shower chair 3 months ago and didn't get back to me. Do I have to keep chasing her? Is her workload too great?" - Participant

NDIS participants were less focussed on exercising their rights to choose a provider and more on finding any quality local provider who could meet their needs. Many were still having trouble finding particular services. Several participants said that that service providers do not return their calls. A number of participants said they were encouraged to attend activities that were inappropriate for their needs.

"Sometimes they put me in groups that don't suit me. They put me on a bus trip with people with severe disability. I would rather be with people like me - like a BBQ for over 40s – people I can have a conversation with" – Participant

"He's often put into groups with people with lower level skills – they don't give us time or choices" – Family member

Significant instability in the market remains and some providers interviewed are still not confident their organisations will survive the NDIS transition. Business surveys indicate a dampening of confidence in the industry. Eight percent of Queensland respondents to the NDS State of the Sector report said that their organisation was considering getting out of the disability sector. At the end of 2017, 7-11% of services were planning to stop providing services in respite, assistive technologies, employment assistance and therapy services.[4] The collapse of one of the State's largest service providers in June 2018 is likely to have a number of causes but was blamed by the CEO on the NDIS[5] and is evidence of continuing instability in the sector. Such fluctuations will have impacts on availability of services and participant choice.

"We're still not out of the woods. We need two years of testing" – Ipswich provider

Interviews with employers in Mackay and Ipswich confirmed that 12-18 months after NDIS roll-out, the market is still in a state of flux. Some smaller providers are doing better than expected, particularly if they have diversified so that the NDIS is not their only source of income. In regional areas, well-known local providers are prevailing over larger new entrants to the market due to their established relationships in communities.

"Most organisations that have popped up haven't been that successful. One of the things people fail to realise about regional and rural areas is that people want to deal with local people and people they know; they are wary of statewide organisations." – Service provider

"In the early days they said small providers won't survive and large will come in but we haven't seen a lot of new providers come in – boutique survive, big ones struggle a bit, hybrid businesses do ok." – Service provider

"It's hard for small providers. They need multiple income streams or a minimum size." – Service provider

"We've seen a number of service providers in Toowoomba close their doors" – Service provider

A major issue is Mackay and Ipswich is the lack of Indigenous service providers. This is an issue that will bite harder as Indigenous families begin to engage in greater numbers with the NDIS.   The Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships (DATSIP) in Mackay is assisting mainstream providers to improve their cultural competency to provide services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. DATSIP is also gearing up to work with Indigenous health and community services to become registered and confident in delivering NDIS services. WorkAbility Qld in Ipswich assisted the local Aboriginal Health Service to register for the NDIS. However, many Indigenous services are busy enough with their core funded activities and do not necessarily need to take the step to diversify into the NDIS.

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[4] NDS (2017) State of the Disability Sector – Queensland
[5] The Daily Examiner "Big charity goes under" 23 June 2018

"The NDIS take up is still low by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – a lot of families have undiagnosed teenagers. They need to be encouraged to look at NDIS, especially straight after school when support drops away. Lots of families are still not ok with saying their child has a disability" – Stakeholder

"In areas like Moranbah and Dysart, there's no services. Travelling services aren't reliable" – Service provider

"We get a request about once a month from providers looking for Indigenous workers"- Stakeholder

About a third of providers in Queensland were sole traders in March 2018. This is lower than the national proportion of 43% sole traders.[6] NDIS stakeholders interviewed for the evaluation felt there was an opportunity to build up the capacity of independent contractors. This part of the market is growing but still has significant growth potential. Data from a broker of 722 Queensland NDIS self-employed workers said they have had very strong worker growth across southern and central Queensland but nearly half (47%) of their Queensland workers are over 50 years of age compared to 31% nationally.[7]

"There are more opportunities for independent contractors – builders, lawn mowers, cleaners, transport, hairdressers. They provide a faster response, they can manage their own workflow" – Stakeholder

"Self-employed support workers have doubled in 12 months" –Stakeholder

In both Ipswich and Mackay, a number of participants felt that there was some way to go before the market would be mature enough and service providers responsive enough to deliver decent choices. Where there are choices available, many people want assistance to narrow those choices to select from 2 or 3 quality options. Service providers also observed that lots of choice in a marketplace is not always what people are looking for. Some participants would like more assistance in choosing between service provider options.

"Some people are overwhelmed by too much choice – they need things narrowed down – structured choice" – Service provider

"They're not facilitating our housing options – they just send through the addresses for us to look at on our own" – Participant

"I like that it is client controlled but it's hard for people with intellectual disability to verbalise what they want – people are thrown support, they don't know that they have choices"- Participant

Choice and flexibility of workers

In mid 2017…

The baseline report found that **service providers are providing choices to their customers about who works with them and when the services are provided, many were strongly committed to this.** Most were aiming to match participants to the right workers, including focussing on personality and interests in preference to skills or qualifications, encouraging participants to have multiple providers and in some cases referring to other service providers if they do not have a suitable worker. Nevertheless, a number of service providers reported that some of their existing staff members had not fully transitioned their practice to work within the ethos of the NDIS, particularly in terms of responding to client choices.

Rostering had emerged as a major challenge for service providers, with many participants only needing support for short periods at certain times of the day, and staff members taking on multiple jobs affecting their availability.

Some participants were still reticent about exercising choice and unsure what level of choice and flexibility was reasonable to expect.

In mid 2018…

Families and participants have become more confident in exercising choice about who works with them. Matching of interests remains very important for participants. Some have become very specific in their

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[6] COAG Disability Reform Council Performance Report – Queensland 31 March 2018
[7] Better Caring – unpublished data from worker database provided in an email

requests, which can be challenging for service providers to respond to. One provider pointed out that they have no obligation to provide services and can cancel service agreements as easily as the participant can. This option was used when a participant was expecting too much from a worker.

> *"I get requests like: Sudanese speaking, must like Sydney Swans AFL football team, between 25 and 35" – Recruiter*

> *"Some participants are requesting too much" – Service provider*

> *"Some participants are expecting too much – we tell them we can cancel their service agreement – there's consequences for actions." – Service provider*

NDS participants are mostly given time to meet and approve the worker before being matched with them, and most are tolerant of occasional changes in staff when their chosen worker is unavailable. The good support workers are in high demand by participants and therefore not always available.

> *"I get to meet and choose who I would like to work with" - Participant*

> *"Parents and carers are realising that they have a choice. We sometimes recruit with the parent to interview the support worker as well. They can't complain then." Service provider*

> *"If a regular worker is sick, sometimes at the last minute it is someone else, but that's ok. It doesn't happen often. I don't like change – I wouldn't like it to happen a lot" – Participant*

> *"I have choices, but because my cleaner is so awesome she's in high demand" - Participant*

Consistency of staff is the overriding consideration for most participants. Some participants said that not enough time was given to build rapport and trust with workers through pre-support meetings and 'replacement' workers were not always appropriately prepared. There is not generally an option for Indigenous people to choose an Indigenous worker.

> *"Consistency of staff is absolutely important. I get anxious around new people" Participant*

> *"When people are brand new they need a basic lesson about how to support people who are vision impaired - don't grab a person's arm, be careful of their head when they're getting in the car – they're not getting that. More explaining is needed before they come" - Participant*

Service providers are investing heavily in rostering and administrative resources to allow choice and flexibility. They recognise it is essential. However, they still find it challenging from a human resources perspective.

> *"There's a settling. People have come to grips that choice and control is a foundation stone and long shifts with clients is a thing of the past." – Service provider*

> *"Rostering is a nightmare. You have to abide by participants choices and it changes every week. That's the most challenging part" – Service provider*

2. Understanding and attributes

Understanding of the NDIS

In mid 2017…

Both Ipswich and Mackay service providers demonstrated a strong understanding of the NDIS and what changes were required within their organisations. Service providers from large organisations, particularly organisations that had services in trial sites or in earlier roll-out regions, were well prepared and many said they had been implementing 'NDIS approaches' (i.e. choice and control, individualised packages) for some time.

At the time, employees still required more understanding about the NDIS, with Ipswich employees, with the benefit of a later roll-out date, being slightly better informed. The most common areas needing improved understanding were how services are funded/new business models; social insurance concepts and principles; the planning and review process; and the role of Local Area Coordinators (LACs).

In mid 2018…

Service providers remain confident of the changes required for their organisations and workforces. They are moving towards these changes but many are not there yet. A longer term cultural change is required in some organisations to respond to the competitive environment. There is no longer any room in organisations for staff who are resistant to implementing NDIS principles.

"The shifting mindset of culture still needs to happen towards the business approach. There's still resistance"- Service provider

"We're on a massive climb. The landscape will be significantly different in 5-10 years." – Service provider

"It's not often now that we get employees that are driving service delivery rather the customers" – Service provider

Service providers expressed some unease about what the new Quality and Safeguards Commission might require of them. One interviewee said they are doing more risk assessments to ensure they are covered for any additional conditions that may be applied.

A number of areas were identified by service providers and other stakeholders as requiring more understanding by workers, planners and managers, including:

- Mental health and how to support participants and provide appropriate planning and review
- Mental health interface with health system
- Functional needs for people with different types of disabilities
- Engaging with Indigenous communities.

"There is not enough awareness and confidence in psychosocial disability" - Employee

Continued efforts are also needed to challenge assumptions and myths amongst potential workers, particularly young people in schools, about what support work actually involves.

Employees said they still needed more understanding of their legal and ethical responsibilities (52%); and the range of services, supports and referral pathways available (48%). Other areas identified by employees requiring improved understanding included:

- LGBTIQ cultural competence
- How to maintain viability of the organisation under NDIS pricing.

Attributes of workers

In mid 2017…

There was strong consistency in what service providers, participants and employees felt were important values and attributes in NDIS workers, with the most common traits being:

- Honesty and integrity
- Empathy and understanding
- Reliability
- Good communicator.

A common theme across service providers, employees and NDIS participants was that skills were secondary to personal attributes and a number of service providers expressed caution 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.

In mid 2018…

There was still a strong theme from the research that personal attributes were more important than skills or qualifications in support workers. Some of the same attributes were mentioned frequently in 2018 as in 2017, particularly:

- Flexibility and reliability

- Communication

- Common sense.

"It's not the same as working at the IGA. You have to understand the impact on participants and families if you cancel." – Recruiter

"Common sense is good but a fun personality is important too. Someone who is able to build rapport quickly" – Ipswich provider

But as service providers settled in to working under the NDIS, some different attributes have emerged as being important to employers, including:

- Emotional resilience

- Lateral thinking, and

- (most of all) to 'like the work'.

"To want to work with others – enjoy the company of people with disability and families, to genuinely like the work"- Service provider

This final point was often raised by participants as well. Participants want to be around people who enjoy their work and like their company. There is a concern by participants that the NDIS has attracted service providers and workers who are more financially motivated than personally motivated. While workers being 'emotionally invested' might be seen as risky by service providers, many participants are looking for people who do have an emotional investment in their jobs and with their clients. A number of participants gave examples of support workers who paid more attention to their phones than their clients. The best workers are engaged, want to be with the participants and therefore are likely to stay around.

"It's hard because a lot of people hate the things that they do. I'd like to be with someone who genuinely enjoys the work that they do and/or genuinely wants to assist people with disabilities. Not just because it's good money." - Participant

"They're there for the pay, not the person. They don't try to get to know the person" – Participant

"I'm worried that service providers are financially motivated – it's not personal anymore" – Participant

"I hadn't seen her in a while and we had a good laugh – something as simple as that can change your whole day… I don't need to know where she lives or her phone number. That's personal. But if you build a rapport with someone it makes things really smooth" - Participant

Some employee respondents also identified this as a key issue.

"A key issue is the need for NDIS workers who care about the NDIS clients/participants they are working with. If they are just there to punch a time card and get paid perhaps that is not the best." - Employee

Interestingly, a NCVER audit of what employability skills employers are asking for in job postings, listed 'positive disposition' as 9th out of 10 requested skills, requested by only 4% of employers in job postings.[8]

While service providers are actively recruiting people from different backgrounds in order to match with a diverse range of clients, there are still very few workers from Indigenous or CALD backgrounds, or workers with disability. A worker with a disability who contributed to the evaluation said he had never met another support worker with a disability and has experienced more employment discrimination in the disability sector than outside the sector.

"When I started working in disability I thought I would experience less discrimination but it's much more…. I can see the benefits of having a disability as a support worker. I've experienced it so I have a better understanding" – Employee

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[8] NCVER (2018) Internet Job Postings: Personal Care and Support Skills. NCVER 10 July 2018

One government stakeholder indicated that there is a missed opportunity for DES providers to engage with the industry. There's currently very little facilitation of jobs in the sector by DES' for people with a disability. The support worker with a disability indicated that this was also his experience when he was a DES client.

"DES workers are happy to do 8 hours a week, they have lived experience, but DES providers are not picking up on the opportunities" – Stakeholder

3. Pathways and career opportunities

Pathways

In mid-2017…

Employers were beginning to looking outside the sector to other customer-service industries and to use alternatives to traditional recruitment processes to ensure they find the right people for the job. As noted above, employers were recognising that the need for experience or a qualification in the industry was considered less important than having the right personality or similar interests to participants.

Healthcare and aged care were often seen as not the right pathway into the NDIS industry. Providing 'care' can go against key principles of supporting capacity and maximising independence.

In mid-2018…

Employers remain less concerned about qualifications for support workers than 'fit' with participants and bringing a client-focussed attitude.

A brokerage organisation for self-employed workers said the need for a qualification depended on the employment arrangement. 48% of their registered workers do not hold a relevant qualification. Workers who provide social and domestic assistance (social support, skill development, transport, companionship, meal preparation, light cleaning and gardening) do not require any qualification, but workers providing personal care services do require a qualification and experience. Ultimately though, it is up to the participant and even if the broker doesn't require qualifications, participants may request this.

"I have some excellent support workers with qualifications but one or two customers don't like something about them, and I have some that I think are not that good, but customers like them." – Service provider

As such, employers are recruiting from a range of different industries, mostly service industries. There is a sense at the moment that the disability sector is more attractive than the aged care sector because workers can have a long connection with participants and can work flexibly in a variety of different settings. One employer noted that people who choose to work in disability tend to be more capable and better communicators.

"We don't get a lot of people from, say, banking that will choose disability – most people who come have worked in a service industry before - education, hospitality, aged care, cleaning." – Service provider

There are mixed views amongst employers about the recruitment of school leavers.   Some employers prioritise having a diverse workforce and want to have a group of young people on staff to provide services to young participants. Others believe that school leavers are generally not mature enough for the roles, particularly if they need to work with little supervision in the community.

"I have a 17-year-old employee who is finishing school exams and I'm still employing people in their 60s, from broad range of backgrounds." – Service provider

"As a rule, young people under 20 are not that successful as support staff. They don't have the maturity to cope well in a one on one situation. If we had a centre we would be more likely to give a young person a go." – Service provider

For mental health providers, people with life experience and people with a lived experience of mental health, personally or within their family, are preferred as support workers. This often, but not always, excludes school leavers.

"We think mums wanting to re-join the workforce are good to target – they've weathered a lot, they've done it all." – Service provider

Nevertheless, it appears that there is still significant potential to draw young people into the industry, if the right supports are in place. Social media data from the WorkAbility Qld *Careers in Disability* campaign indicates that most of the interest in careers in the industry is coming from 18 to 24-year-olds, and the most viewed story on the website was about a young support worker who points out that skills, knowledge and experience do not matter so much in the industry as being keen and willing to learn.[9]

Some service providers are targeting university students for support work roles, particularly those studying health sciences. These students are often looking for casual work and will usually be available for work for three or four years, providing a degree of stability for clients. Some students even continue to take on shifts once they have graduated because they enjoy the work and have built up good relationships with families.

> *"Some of the people who work for us have graduated from uni (law, nursing, teaching) and still choose to work for us, for example in school holidays or a lawyer comes one weekend a month because of the relationship he has with the family. A lot of people's motivation is relationship based." – Service provider*

WorkAbility Qld has made some progress in promoting the industry to university students through its jobs roadshow held at Griffith University. This was considered a successful event, attracting 94 students from five different academic departments. A longer-term objective is to expose therapy students to the industry so that they stay in the industry once they graduate in their professions.

> *"The idea was to get them work as support workers while they are students then they become entrenched in the sector and will be open to NDIS customers when they graduate as therapists." - Coordinator*

Career opportunities

In mid-2017…

Just over half of employees surveyed were satisfied or very satisfied with the career advancement opportunities available to them. That said, 'career advancement opportunities' was down the list (ranked 7 out of 9 factors) in terms of factors affecting career choice. About half the respondents also indicated that they were not aware of different pathways in NDIS work or local career opportunities.

The main reasons employees said they decided to work in the disability sector were because they liked working with people and because they wanted to make a difference in people's lives. Work-life balance was considered the most important factor in career choices, followed by PD opportunities and support and income (in LISS) and followed by income and type of work (in Mackay). Professional status and type of clients were only important to a small minority of respondents.

In mid-2018…

Issues around wages, conditions, development opportunities and career satisfaction have all increased in prominence over the twelve months.

Employees are concerned about pay rates, casualisation of the workforce and a lack of rewards for skilled and experienced staff.

> *"The price points are based off Level 2, 90%+ contact hours, no supervision, no team meetings, no admin, no case management. It's a massive attack on our sector and fundamentally undermines the Equal Pay Case. It also puts NDIS participants at risk and reduces their quality of care when the scheme rests off an unskilled, casualised workforce." - Employee*

> *"I question why a person with no experience in the sector can come in on the same pay level as me. I have to work with challenging behaviour and they get the cushy ones" – Employee*

> *"There's no money for staff meetings so they're not having regular get togethers to keep people happy." – Stakeholder*

> *"The rate of pay does not encourage skilled workers to apply for positions" – Service provider*

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[9] WorkAbility Qld "Be Part of Something Better" Campaign www.careersindisability.com.au.

NDS data confirms that casual employment in the disability sector has been growing substantially and Queensland has a higher proportion of casual employment than other states (more on this below under 'numbers of workers').[10]

The issue of casualisation was raised most often by employees surveyed in this research as the number one workforce issue that needed to be addressed. Other points raised frequently were:

- Wages, conditions and outdated employment conditions

- Shortage of skilled staff

- Lack of resources for training, supervision and staff meetings.

These issues are all risks for staff retention. Some employers and other stakeholders acknowledge that retention of existing staff has been neglected in the strong focus on recruitment of new staff. Research funded by unions[11] in recent months points to a significant challenge in retaining valued and skilled workers under the NDIS pricing model.

"Retention of good ones is not there because management is not investing time into retaining great current staff – they're focusing on recruiting new staff" - Stakeholder

While career advancement is not a key issue for workers in this industry, there are indications it is becoming more important (See Figure 4 below). The NDIS has required restructuring of organisations so that the number of management roles have decreased, or remained the same, while direct support roles have increased substantially. Almost every service provider interviewed for this research said that their workforce has at least doubled, with the vast majority of new positions going to direct support workers. That said, a couple of organisations have started re-hiring at the management level because of the increasing complexity of the service delivery environment - they need experienced staff who can trouble-shoot and make decisions. The most workable balance of management roles versus direct worker roles is still emerging.

"It's probably more problematic that above the direct level has to be skinny – the opportunity to climb the ladder decreases" – Service provider

"There's minimal management in organisations now. The management positions are gone but the workload has doubled." – Service provider

Numerous respondents indicated that there was still a lot more work to do to challenge myths about working in the industry and make disability work 'sexy'. WorkAbility Qld has begun to focus on this through its 'Careers in Disability' campaign. This project is making some inroads (see Table 1 below). However, ongoing concerted efforts will be needed to change perceptions at a population level. Only 11% of the 46 employees surveyed said they were aware of the campaign.

"We need to make the job more sexy to people who may not have looked on it as an opportunity – young men" – Service provider

"People in the community still think it's about wiping bums, but they don't understand wider breadth of the disability industry" – Service provider

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[10] NDS (2018) Australian Disability Workforce Report 3rd edition – July 2018
[11] The Australia Institute (2018) A Portable Training Entitlement System for the Disability Support Services Sector. Report for the NSW Branch of the Australian Services Union; UNSW Social Policy Research Centre (2017) *Reasonable, necessary and valued: Pricing disability services for quality support and decent jobs*". Report for Health Services Union, Australian Services Union and United Voice.

Table 1: Data from Careers in Disability Campaign 25 April - 5 June 2018

Reach	1,589,236 people (Greater Brisbane, Gold Coast, Cairns & FNQ, Wide Bay)
Active on website (click through)	75%
Video views	122,408
Facebook followers	5 x increase from 96 to 479

Source: Health and Community Services Workforce Council

WorkAbility Qld has also been holding 'Careers in Disability' expos to promote the industry to job seekers and to recruit people into training and or available job roles. These events have garnered significant interest in the locations they have been held and were cited by several evaluation respondents as a key achievement of WorkAbility Qld. See Table 2 below. Survey data indicated that the majority of employers or job agencies that participated in the events will fill jobs as a result of the expo or be able to offer work placements.

Table 2: Data on Careers in Disability Expos

Location & date	Attendees	Job roles available
Ipswich 15 Nov 17	301	100
Rockhampton 28 Mar 18	130	100
Cairns 11 May 18	150	Limited (NDIS yet to roll out)
Brisbane 28 June 18	400	500

Source: Health and Community Services Workforce Council

Employees said that when they make choices about their careers, work-life balance was the most important factor they consider. This factor was also the most important in 2017. These results need to be considered with some caution given the small numbers involved (46 respondents in 2018 and 28 respondents in 2017), however it appears that the relative importance of PD opportunities and support has increased over time, as has the type of client. Career advancement opportunities and professional status remains of lower importance for employees. Over a quarter of 2018 respondents said professional status was unimportant and 11% said career advancement was unimportant. See Figure 4 below.

The value placed on the flexibility of NDIS work is a theme that emerged in the qualitative research as well. This is a factor which could be highlighted more in recruitment campaigns.

"What attracts them to the industry is flexibility – they might have study, kids, other employment, or caring… a lot of people have something else going on" – Service provider

Figure 4: Key factors affecting career choice 2018
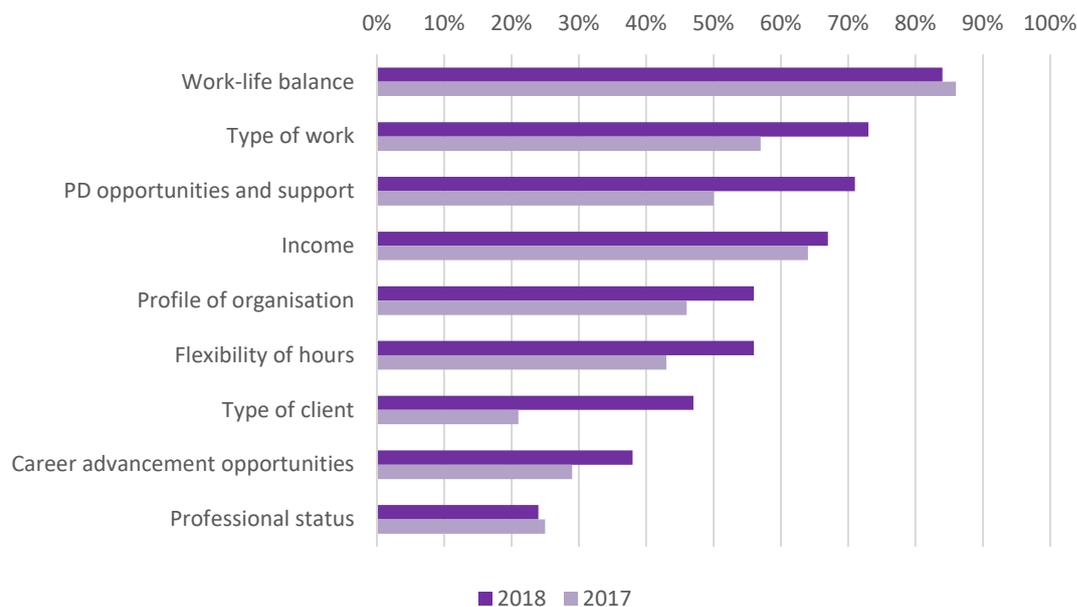
Source: WorkAbility Qld evaluation: NDIS employee surveys 2018 and 2017

4. Numbers of workers and applicants

Numbers of workers

In mid 2017…

The local workforce data collected through the Workforce Wizard tool administered by NDS was fairly limited in 2017, but it was clear that organisations were beginning to grow their workforces. There were particular increases in numbers of people in the under 25 and the 25-44 year age groups in LISS but there was still some way to go to attract an equal number of male workers in the industry. Statewide, 70% of respondents to a March 2017 NDS survey said they were in the process of recruiting.

Casualisation had begun to increase in 2017 and a trend of decreasing average weekly hours was emerging. The Statewide NDS data showed that casual work made up about 45% of the workforce in June 2017 while about 11% of workers were in full-time employment.

In mid-2018…

The NDIS take up, activation and utilisation rates are lower than expected. Participant numbers in Queensland are around 50% of estimates (54% in Mackay and 45% in LISS), about 17% of plans received have not been activated and the utilisation rate in Queensland is only 56%.   These figures indicate there is still significant demand to come. The NDIA estimates that the majority of participants (60,062 people out of a total of 91,217 people) are expected to enter the scheme in the third year of transition (2018-19). [12]

This all means that the sector will need to grow significantly this year and next. The current NDIS workforce is estimated to be 13,550 – 16,550 FTE. By next year (2019), the workforce size is expected to double to reach 29,450 – 35,950 FTE.[13] Given that the average working hours is 22 hours per week for direct support workers, the actual numbers of workers required may be closer to 48,000 or an additional 25,000 workers.

Most of these workers will be direct support workers. The vast majority of support in plans requires workers who can provide assistance with daily living such as personal care, transport, cleaning, gardening and other

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[12] Queensland Government (2018) The NDIS in Queensland: Roll Out Data and Trends, July 2018
[13] NDIS (2018) Quarter 3 2017-2018 Report. Qld statistics as at 31 March 2018.

domestic activities (53%); assistance with social and community participation (18%); and capacity building for daily living, often therapy (12%).[14]

According to NDS data,[15] 82% of organisations were recruiting to fill support worker roles by March 2018. This data also shows that the decline in permanent full-time work has been most marked in Queensland. By March 2018, less than 10% of disability employment in Queensland was full-time, compared to around 25% in NSW/ACT and WA. The proportion of casual workers was 50%, which was a 5-8% higher casualisation rate than other states, except for NT/SA which is on a par with Queensland. Workforce turnover has also increased in the last year, to reach a relatively high 6% by March 2018 for permanent workers (average turnover across the workforce is about 4.5% for permanent workers).

The female to male ratio in the disability workforce in Queensland is 7:3, which is roughly the same in all jurisdictions. However, Queensland has the oldest disability workforce with workers over 45 years making up 49% of the workforce versus 34% of the total Australian workforce.[16]

Number of suitable applicants

In mid-2017…

Most service providers interviewed were struggling to find well-suited candidates for vacant positions and there was 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. Service providers were still mostly using traditional recruitment practices (such as advertising on SEEK) but many were recognising that these methods take too long and do not always surface attributes that are important for particular clients. In the mental health area, organisations were having trouble recruiting because they are offering a lower pay rate than in the past.

Some service providers had existing enterprise agreements that did not offer the level of flexibility required in an NDIS business environment. Concerns were emerging about how to attract quality staff to work for lower pay rates in line with the NDIS price guide.

In mid-2018…

NDS data shows that employers are finding it harder to fill their vacancies as time goes on, with 79% able to fill vacancies in March 2017 but only 67% able to fill vacancies by March 18.[17] This data is supported by qualitative data from employers and stakeholders in Mackay and Ipswich, which indicates that there are fewer and fewer suitable applicants for jobs and that organisations are on a constant recruitment drive. Mackay is challenged by the fluctuating nature of the mining sector; when mining picks up, service providers notice a lowering of the caliber of applicants for disability industry roles.

"I've just done four consecutive rounds over four weeks and only got one good applicant" – Service provider

"We're still struggling as a sector to get people in. Mackay's unemployment rate is down again. The resources sector picking up. There's not a huge pool." – Service provider

"The applicant pool isn't strong and there's poaching going on left, right and centre" – Service provider

Qualitative data from Mackay indicates a significant issue with meeting demand from NDIS participants for all the allied health professions. One service provider said they are spending up to $18,000 per person on recruitment services to bring people from Adelaide, Perth and Tasmania and these workers often don't last long.

Employer respondents identified a number of issues with finding applicants and placing them in sustainable employment, including:

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[14] Queensland Government (2018) The NDIS in Queensland: Roll Out Data and Trends, July 2018
[15] NDS (2018) Australian Disability Workforce Report 3rd edition – July 2018
[16] NDS (2018) Australian Disability Workforce Report 3rd edition – July 2018
[17] NDS (2018) Australian Disability Workforce Report 3rd edition – July 2018

- Clunky, inaccessible, centrally-managed recruitment processes

- Lack of responsiveness from Job Active and DES providers

- Unrealistic expectations of new recruits

- Competition with other industries, particularly mining (in Mackay) and aged care

- Delays in gaining blue and yellow cards.

"Over the last 12 months I would just complete recruitment and then they (Job Active provider) would ring. They should keep their finger on the pulse. When they send people to look at the quality is not high and providers are not proactive." - Employer

"We're trying to recruit 20 people a month. Of those, realistically, less than half are successful. They give it a go, and find they can't work long hours or don't want to work weekends or nights. The relationship building is hard for new workers who haven't worked in the industry." – Service provider

"The issue is that you need a yellow card to do disability but not aged care. A yellow card can take 6-8 weeks to get so they go off to aged care... The problem is they can't start till they've got that stuff, so they go and take a job at Liquorland" – Service provider

Some NDIS participants indicated that the calibre of staff was not always up to expectations. This was particularly evident in Mackay. It was not widespread but, participants could point to a small, but not insignificant number of workers who did not have the right values and approaches to provide NDIS services. A number of employees themselves acknowledged that there was a shortage of workers who understand and implement the ethos of the NDIS.

"Participants tell me that the quality is not what they want. It's all over the place. Because of the competition for workers service providers are taking on people that aren't that good. Professionalism is a problem. There's not a huge amount of poor staff, but it's there." – Advocate

"Some support workers are not good at following individual choices. They're acting like the NDIS hasn't happened." – Participant

"A lot of support workers still think it's nonsense to give people power" – Service provider

Recruitment processes that service providers and other stakeholders say do work include:

- Locally managed recruitment by staff members that know the NDIS participant

- Offering a choice of permanent part-time or casual contracts

- Word of mouth, including hiring participants' existing support workers

- Employment based on values

- Using work placements as a 'try before you buy' technique

- Effective collaboration with employment agencies and recruiters.

"If we're advertising for casual staff, we don't get great uptake but for permanent part-time we get good take up and the higher levels fill really quickly – we can turn it around in 2-3 weeks. The lower levels take a bit longer." – Service provider

"A participant will come and say, can you employ my support worker? As long as they meet the basics of our recruitment, we will. They are often very good workers. They bring appropriate experience and reputation." – Service provider

A number of service providers are using work placements through TAFE as a way to recruit new workers. They like the 'try before you buy' aspect. But not all find it worthwhile to put in the time to manage the placements.

"We've just partnered with TAFE Queensland. They send us placements. There's very little cost to us. We can pick the eyes out of the future workforce. TAFE now understand our needs better so will send us placements that are a better match for our organisation" – Service provider

"We take people on placement. It's great for try before you buy" – Service provider

"We don't do work placements. There's a lot of time caught up in the placements. You have to ask every participant. It's too hard to manage." – Service provider

Service providers that were able to take advantage of the specialised skills of recruitment agencies benefited from the relationship. A private recruitment agency in Ipswich is particularly popular because they have developed excellent capabilities in matching workers to participants and in coordinating government funding and incentives.

"The recruitment agency, xxx, has changed our recruitment processes. She gets the profile, she understands the fit, scans the people, and calls it like it is." – Service provider

There are some challenges for Job Active providers in working in the NDIS space. NDIS jobs often start with a low number of hours, which means that Job Active providers have to find multiple jobs for a job seeker to achieve the minimum employment hours to receive payment and for the employers to receive a subsidy. Furthermore, when a job becomes available, the Job Active providers need time to find, screen and prepare jobseekers for the role, and this can take time that the employer might not have if a participant is waiting for a service. Job Actives are finding it easier to work with large employers that can absorb staff in a range of different areas if the NDIS work is fluctuating. The WorkAbility Qld Roadshow events, which facilitate direct engagement between jobseekers and numerous employers on the same day, worked well for Job Active providers. The Roadshows are an innovation that emerged from the Ipswich region, but it built on earlier activities to foster direct engagement between employers and jobseekers, such as the Jobs Expo in Townsville and the pop-ups in shopping centres in Mackay.

"An event like a Roadshow is a good vehicle for jobseekers that may not know they want to go into the industry. For the Roadshow in Toowoomba, 20 out of 100 people got jobs. The JAs were happy with that result." – Stakeholder

5. Training and understanding skill gaps

Understanding skill gaps

In mid-2017…

Key areas for skill development centred around non-disability specific areas such as decision making, planning and problem solving, IT literacy, capacity-building of participants, implementing user-directed approaches, communication with families, innovation and creativity, business skills and matching and rostering, career development skills and NDIS processes.

Qualifications were not seen as a necessary channel for achieving these skills.

In mid-2018…

NDS data shows Queensland has the lowest percentage of formally qualified new recruits. Only 15% of new workers have qualifications, compared to 21% nationally, and 30% in Victoria.[18] This is also backed up by the qualitative results of interviews which indicate that qualifications are not generally considered important by employers when recruiting, with personality and 'the right fit' taking precedence.

Findings from a recent WorkAbility Qld report on disability traineeships confirmed that a culture of training does not exist in the disability sector in the way that it does in other service sectors. There are highly mixed views of the value of training in the disability sector, and given that there is no mandate for qualifications, some service

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[18] NDS (2018) Australian Disability Workforce Report 3rd edition – July 2018

providers prefer to deliver their own non-accredited training in house. This research also found a significant lack of awareness of training pathways amongst both service providers and individuals.[19]

New NCVER research on skills requested in internet job postings for personal care positions in aged and disability care[20] shows that employers are seeking employees with first aid and caregiving experience. The top 5 employability skills employers are asking for are:

• Communication skills (48%)

• Organisational skills (17%)

• Time management (11%)

• Computer skills (11%)

• Writing (9%)

According to employers responding to this evaluation, areas where skill development is still needed includes:

• Working with people with psychosocial disabilities, particularly understanding triggers, de-escalating

• Understanding the ethos of the NDIS, person-centred practice and support to achieve goals

• High-end support work - supporting people with complex needs

• Problem-solving

• Communication

• Writing progress notes

• Managing larger teams

• Rostering.

"Skills that are missing are the 'new way'. These are our customers, we need to keep them happy. It's person-centred support" – Service provider

"Staff need to make every shift count to work towards goals. It's not babysitting" – Service provider

"Mental health is so different from disability. We want to see a higher-level qualification and 5-10 years' experience. It's very hard to find." – Service provider

"For the high intensity work, if someone doesn't have 5-10 years' experience, I would like to see a qual. It's not absolute, but it is a fall-back. If you haven't had experience in the field, the qual gives you an underpinning practice." – Service provider

"The ability to have an open and honest conversation with participant is a big one. How to be diplomatic. It's a particular skill set." – Service provider

"It's around managing a much larger team. If you're providing supervision to 13 people, you're managing and rostering and accounting and record keeping – it's significant" – Service provider

Employees said that the top 3 skills they needed to improve their performance as an NDIS worker were understanding the NDIS; knowledge of the range of services, supports and referral pathways available; and business skills. Understanding legal and ethical responsibilities was also a key skill need for over a third of respondents.

Each of these skills were seen as important by a higher proportion of respondents in 2018 than in 2017. As noted above, these results need to be considered with some caution given the small numbers involved, but it is

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[19] Outpost Consulting (2018) Disability Traineeships: Final Report. Report for WorkAbility Qld.
[20] NCVER (2018) Internet Job Postings: Personal Care and Support Skills. NCVER 10 July 2018

interesting that understanding the NDIS moved up from a ranking of 7 to being the number one area that employees felt they needed to improve, with over 50% of respondents seeing it as an area that needed attention. Knowledge of the range of services, supports and referral pathways available, and understanding legal and ethical responsibilities were also seen as much more significant areas for development by employees in 2018. See Figure 5.

Figure 5: Knowledge and skills needed by employees to improve their performance as NDIS workers
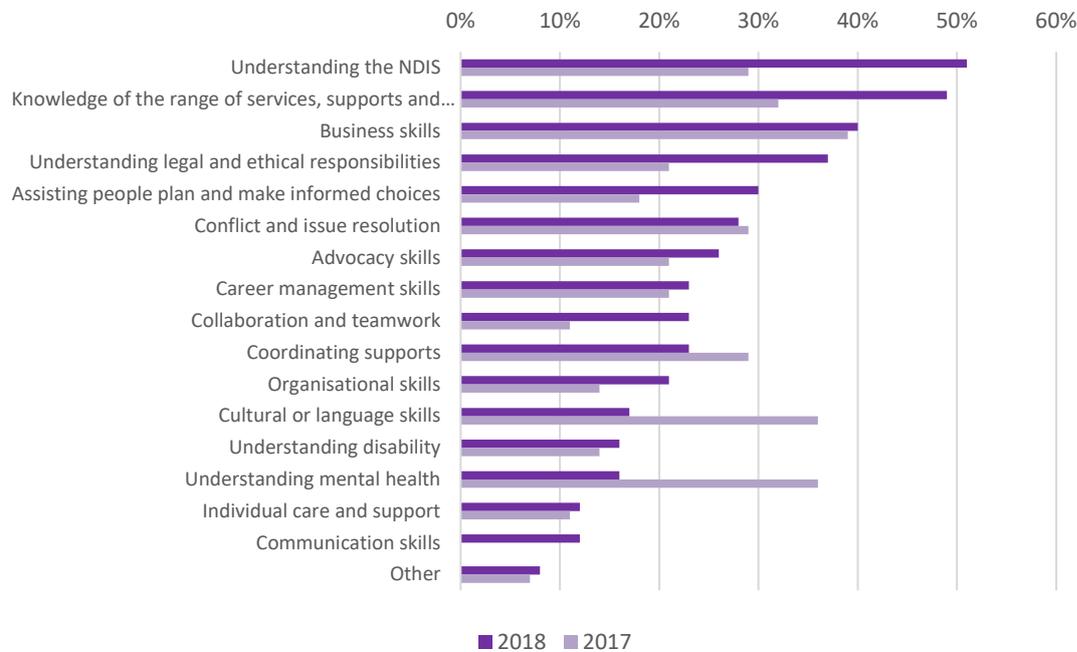
Source: WorkAbility Qld evaluation: NDIS employee surveys 2018 and 2017

Opportunities for professional supervision and reflection with peers was raised as an issue in 2017 and again in 2018. There are concerns about both the quality of the support and the welfare of the worker when professional supervision is not offered. Most service providers say there is no budget for these activities under the NDIS, but recognise it is a significant issue.

"People can't look after challenging behaviour day in day out. They need time to debrief. We try to explain this to the planners but they're not getting it" – Service provider

"We need to support staff but there's no budget." – Service provider

Availability, accessibility and quality of training

In mid-2017…

Employers said that training is readily available but the quality of delivery is variable. The RTO relationship was seen as critical. Employers that established strong relationships with quality trainers were able to ensure staff receive the right training, when and where they needed it.

Many employers were not familiar with the new qualifications for individual support and were unable to comment on the suitability of its content.

In mid-2018…

The lack of resources for training within the NDIS pricing model has emerged as a significant issue for service providers and staff members. Training is mostly occurring outside the employment arrangement, apart from

the mandatory elements such as workplace health and safety. Stakeholders who know the system have indicated that free or low-cost training opportunities are available but many employers do not know about these and the big cost is in releasing staff to undertake the training.

> *"Service providers need to work out how to generate some income for staff training/debriefing/support/resourcing" – Service provider*

> *"There's lots of training opportunities that cost little to nothing for employers, but they need someone to hold their hand so they understand" - Stakeholder*

Some service providers are starting to think about collective ways of addressing the need for ongoing training and upskilling. They see it as an industry-wide issue that should be addressed through collaborative approaches and sharing of resources.

> *"The training issue is a really big one. How as an industry do we maintain a skilled workforce, with no margin? It's that shared resourcing across agencies, collective ways of addressing it across the sector...it'd be great to think more broadly about meeting training needs" – Service provider*

As participants and families begin to self-manage their NDIS packages, and employ their own workers, attention will also need to be given to how training occurs within this type of employment arrangement.

Data about the training pipeline for support workers statewide indicates strong enrolment in disability related qualifications at the Certificate III level, with around 7,300 completions of the Certificate III in Individual Support between 2015 and May 2018 (see Table 3 below). It is important to note here that the Certificate III in Individual Support also trains aged care workers and a proportion of people qualifying will find work in that industry, rather than NDIS work.

As highlighted above, many service providers are ambivalent about the value and need for qualifications. However, there is a recognition that some basic foundation skills are required for work in the industry. Most employers will provide these skills as part of their induction. Some are now looking to the VET system to supply these units of competency as a skill set, on a fee for service basis or through a government-funded arrangement. [21] Skill sets have the potential to boost the pipeline of qualified workers.

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[21] Outpost Consulting (2018) Disability Traineeships: Final Report

Table 3. Commencements and completions in Certificate III traineeship and non-traineeship pathways 2015/16 – 2017/18

Pathway	Commencements			Completions		
	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18 YTD	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18 YTD
Certificate III in Disability and Certificate III in Individual Support – Traineeship Pathway	261	299	254	91	158	127
Certificate III in Disability and Certificate III in Individual Support – Non-traineeship Pathway	2,626	6,959	4,888	1,534	4,125	1,392

Source: Data supplied by Queensland DET for WorkAbility Qld Disability Traineeships research as at 14/5/2018

While there has not been any criticism of the content of the Individual Support qualification, a key concern is that many students complete their work placement in an aged care facility, because it is easier from a supervision perspective. Then they have not had exposure to disability workplaces when they enter the workforce.

> *"People are doing placements in aged care because disability service providers are uncomfortable with the idea of letting someone go into homes and do personal care. Then they don't have exposure or terminology. They call participants 'patients' or 'residents'." – Service provider*

Formal training pathways are not well understood, and as the WorkAbility Qld Disability Traineeships project revealed, there is significant potential for increasing use of traineeships in the industry, particularly amongst larger providers with supervisory capacity, which provide some centre-based services. School students, Indigenous people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds could benefit from such structured pathways.[22]

As noted above, training is not always seen as the best or only way to gain the skills needed by disability workers. In some cases, formal training is seen as a drawback because people start to believe they know more than the individuals or the families they are supporting.

> *"I'm not knocking training but I listen to people with a disability – they don't care. When you've grown up with a disability, you don't want someone with a qualification saying how it should be done." – Service provider*

In the mental health space, there is a stronger training culture. Maintaining up to date skills is considered very important. Most staff come with qualifications and providers expect regular participation in online training modules.

> *"We have mandatory online training every month; refresher training to keep people's skills current. But its non-billable. There's pressure on the budget." – Service provider*

Allied health is a NDIS shortage area. DSS has estimated that 10% of NDIS jobs roles will need to be in allied health. Thus, if 17,650 FTE additional jobs are needed, approximately 1,765 therapists will be needed. There is a particular lack of clinicians in areas without allied health training programs.

> *"Allied health are swamped. There's a big need but we have no clinicians with the experience with NDIS participants. We can't get skilled therapists in Mackay. CQU only offers nursing" – Service provider*

In 2016 in Queensland 8,800 domestic students completed university level health qualifications and 44,757 enrolled in these qualifications. Enrolments and completions in health professions has been increasing over time. There has been nearly a doubling of university enrolments in health qualifications in Queensland the 10

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[22] Outpost Consulting (2018) Disability Traineeships: Final Report. Report for WorkAbility Qld.

years prior to 2016. In fact, growth in this area of study has been stronger in Queensland than in any of the other four large jurisdictions.[23] This is good news for the NDIS, but it is impossible to predict how many of these workers will be directed into NDIS jobs. Furthermore, strategies will be needed to encourage qualified professionals to move to areas of need, particularly areas such as Mackay where there are no allied health training institutions. Thought will also need to be put into retaining these professionals in the sector. Research in Victoria shows that within 7-8 years of graduation, approximately 30% of allied health workers leave their profession.[24]

6. Strength and sustainability of the networks

In mid-2017...

The WorkAbility Networks in both locations had a good mix of participants and had been focussing on practical activities to promote disability careers and grow the pool of suitable workers. The actions being implemented reflected the specific needs of the region, as identified by the stakeholders. The Mackay WorkAbility Network had a strong focus on promotion of NDIS jobs, organisational learning and information sharing within the group. The LISS region focus had been more around specific projects for matching jobseekers with training and employment.

The Mackay WorkAbility Qld site was challenged by not having a NDIA local presence for many months, nor was there a LAC operating in the region. Many organisations were still grappling with NDIS processes at the time of the baseline study. LISS stakeholders, on the other hand, had been able to learn from a number of roll-out sites, particularly their neighbours in Toowoomba, and NDIA and LAC relationships were able to be set up reasonably early in the WorkAbility process.

In mid-2018...

Mackay - status

At the time of the follow-up study, the Mackay local WorkAbility Qld network had been dissolved for almost 12 months. After WorkAbility Qld funding ceased, the Mackay Regional Council agreed to take over the group and run it as an interagency network. There was interest at the time from about 10 members to keep the group going in this format.

Unfortunately, the representative from the Council moved away from the region and the group did not get off the ground. However, in the last few months a new Disability Interagency Group has emerged, hosted by the Council. The members work together on a number of NDIS issues, including workforce issues. Attendees have found this a useful avenue to discuss issues, although a number of respondents said that they were not aware of any collaborative arrangement addressing NDIS issues in the Mackay region. There is also a Support Coordinator network run by one of the larger service providers.

"We don't catch up formally any more, but Mackay's not big so we see people in different forums. I don't know of any particular forums for workforce." – Employer

"We don't have a lot of connection with other providers now" - Employer

Interviewees said the Mackay network started strongly and attracted a lot of interest initially but lost traction towards the end. The late announcement of the timing of the NDIS roll-out meant that service providers quickly became pre-occupied with getting their systems and processes NDIS ready. Workforce, while important, became a second order issue in the rush to transition clients into the scheme.

"The challenge with WorkAbility Qld was that the person was only funded to work a couple of days a week... it lost momentum. Two days a week was not enough to try and facilitate everything." – Stakeholder

"It started strong then died. People got busy in work with the NDIS. The Coordinator was good but people didn't have time when they were trying to roll out the NDIS" – Stakeholder

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[23] Australian Government (2018) Higher Education Statistics
[24] Phillip, K. (2015). Allied Health: the untapped potential in the Australian health system. Australian Health Review.

"WorkAbility came in too late… no one had the time to do anything. It was just prior to us rolling out. We didn't know we were next. We thought it would be Cairns but it came to Mackay" - Employer

Other challenges included:

- Lack of sharing between providers; significant time required to build trust
- Lack of traction outside of Mackay
- Limited time-frame.

"There was a lack of buy-in from other organisations that weren't as open" – Employer

"The time-frame of 12 months was very tight." - Coordinator

The Coordinator estimated that about 60% of the local action plan was achieved. Key achievements of the network included:

- A pop-up shop to promote disability careers
- Engaging people outside the disability sector – Job Actives, RTOs, health providers
- Connection with DATSIP
- Building personal relationships between service providers (good for participants).

Mackay – next steps

In the Mackay region, respondents offered the following perspectives on future NDIS workforce priorities:

- More promotion of disability careers and myth-busting about what the job involves
- Focus on rural areas outside Mackay
- Engage with DATSIP and Neighbourhood centres to develop Indigenous and CALD workforce
- Consider opportunities for school-based traineeships and targeted Back to Work approach
- Acknowledgement that workforce needs are growing, but it's not as sudden as expected.

LISS - status

The LISS region local network had strong engagement initially, with 50 or more participants in early ecosystem meetings. While participation as a large group dropped off as time went on, a core group of service providers continued to work with the WorkAbility Qld coordinator to drive activity in the region. The Coordinator engaged well across the region and had strong support from her networks. Some innovative ideas emerged from the LISS region, most notably the Roadshow concept which has been picked up and is being run in other WorkAbility Qld regions across the State.

The Roadshow model involves collaborating with Job Active providers to invite jobseekers with an interest in the industry to an event where they have an opportunity to hear about what work in the industry involves, and what training and pathways lead to jobs in the industry. They can then participate in a 'speed interview' with service providers who are looking to fill roles.

The Coordinator credits much of her success to "saying what I meant, and doing what I said I would" as well as the support of "a few key service providers on the ground who provided links to others and a sounding board". Stakeholders said that it was great to have a neutral person on the ground, driving the workforce agenda.

"Having a neutral person in (the Coordinator) was important – she had a big role in interagency meetings, linking with providers, engagement" – Stakeholder

The work pioneered in the LISS region has had ongoing and broader influence. A Disability Interagency meeting, convened by Council and chaired by QDN, attracts over 50 participants monthly and provides an ongoing forum for discussion of NDIS workforce issues.

Key achievements of the LISS WorkAbility Qld process were:

- An action focussed agenda

- Development, piloting and implementation of the Roadshow model

- Creating a strong connection with the Indigenous health service

- Creating connections with universities and highlighting allied health issues

- Linking in with other activities going on in the region such as the Fresh Futures Market

- Building connections with councils and stakeholders in rural areas.

"WorkAbility Qld was really good. I was lucky to have heard about it through the mental health collaborative – it was just what we needed." – Service provider

"Being part of the roadshow was the best thing that we did" – Service provider

"The networking has been A-plus" – Service provider

"WorkAbility Qld did a lot in a year especially getting employment services on board and breaking into communities" - Stakeholder

The process in the LISS region also experienced some challenges, which provide lessons for future WorkAbility Qld sites and activities, notably:

- The data collection from events needed to be more systemised and thought-out to maximise follow up and monitoring of outcomes

- More centralised support for marketing and branding

- Better shared understanding needed around role expectations and limitations

- Short timeframe to achieve significant change. Concern that the strategy will lose momentum or go backwards without continued support.

"Too short – needs to be ongoing for another few years" – Service provider

"The foundations of the relationships take 12 months" – Stakeholder

"Keen to keep going with WorkAbility – we need a local response for service providers" - Stakeholder

LISS – next steps

LISS evaluation respondents pointed to a number of priorities to focus on in improving the NDIS workforce in the region, including:

- Understanding and promoting opportunities for a shared workforce across the industry, particularly for financial and administrative roles

- Considering a role for universities in providing opportunities for professional supervision, reflection and improving practice

- Urgent requirement to increase processing of working with children checks and criminal history screening (note: the 2018 budget has included funding to automate the blue card application system)

- Greater focus on supporting the rural NDIS workforce, including through better employment infrastructure such as employment agencies, transport and training providers

- Promote the industry and provide support for individual contractors to undertake disability support work as well as transport and domestic assistance

- Engage the DES network to provide opportunities for people with disability within the sector.

"One of the barriers is the length of time to pass the security checks. If you get someone interested and then they've got to wait for 4-13 weeks, interest can go quickly" – Service Provider

"Better understanding of aligning sectors eg aged care, health" – Service provider

"Service providers need to work on staff retention strategies" – Stakeholder

"Build up the capacity of individual contractors" - Stakeholder

Summary of progress 2016 – 2018

Stage 4 of the WorkAbility Qld evaluation will generate more data and greater analysis of the key achievements and limitations of the project. The following points are offered as themes emerging from the first three years of implementation, which may benefit planning for the final year of implementation.

Key achievements

WorkAbility Qld Brand

WorkAbility Qld has quickly built up a strong brand, both in local regions and statewide. This brand has lifted the visibility of workforce issues and provided an opportunity to anchor an ongoing relationship with service providers and other stakeholders on NDIS workforce issues. Having a consistent message from a united industry voice is more effective than having four industry organisations focussing on different priorities.

Connecting the players

Relationship-building between the various stakeholders has had a significant benefit. Having an independent person in the regions to broker relationships and spread awareness about the different programs and organisations involved in the employment and training space has worked well for all parts of the eco-system. Having formal governance arrangements between the parties at the strategic level has facilitated collaboration between different Departments and different levels of government.

Disability careers events

The Jobs Roadshows, and later the Careers in Disability Expos are remarked upon by all key stakeholders as key achievements of the strategy. The simple concept of bringing jobseekers in direct contact with employers, particularly those struggling to find staff, has generated significant results for both parties in the locations they've been held. The events have also raised the profile of the NDIS workforce issues and built up the WorkAbility Qld brand; they have generated widespread interest and some media attention. Expanding the Roadshows to target TAFE students and university students has generated new avenues for attracting new staff.

Place-based approach

Having coordinators in place in regions prior to the NDIS roll-out has been a useful strategy for starting the conversations about the NDIS workforce and developing some practical activities to support workforce development, particularly attraction. The eco-system approach allows all the stakeholders to be involved and has helped establish ongoing relationships between service providers, employment agencies, RTOs, and employment and training programs. The regional workforce profiles and action plans gave service providers the customised information they needed to support decision-making on workforce issues. The coordinators allowed central office stakeholders to have a direct line of sight with the regions, which contributed more reliable, 'just in time' intelligence on the status of the regions.

Consortium leadership

Having four established industry organisations drive the initiative capitalised on the combined intelligence and stakeholder reach. It has allowed each organisation to broaden its thinking, build its relationships with the other peak bodies and improve its advocacy position with government. From a government perspective, the structure provides a strong industry representative base. It provides a central and convenient means to drive projects, troubleshoot issues, test ideas and receive a united position. WorkAbility Qld has demonstrated that consortium models can be very effective.

Social media campaign

While the social media campaign is still in the early stages of implementation, it has strong potential to boost the workforce attraction activities and debunk myths about NDIS work, particularly amongst young people. The messaging is aligned to research on people's motivation's for joining the NDIS workforce[25] and to participants' desire for workers who are more personally, rather than financially, motivated (highlighted above). The ongoing need to challenge people's image of disability work was a prominent theme in this research.

Securing training projects

The identification and articulation of systemic training pipeline issues led the consortium to develop an Education and Training issues paper which underpinned successful advocacy for additional training-related projects from relevant agencies, outside the core funding agreement. These projects include research projects on training products and disability traineeships and a suite of activities, packaged together as the National Training Skills and Support Strategy, which will be implemented over a three-year period.

Challenges

Building sustainability with short timeframes

Most service providers and stakeholders in the case study regions pointed out that building relationships and generating concrete actions takes significant time. Many said that it took the 12 months of the funded program just to get the network members trusting each other and working well together. While it was important to start thinking about workforce issues prior to roll-out, once the NDIS hit (in both regions the timing was earlier than expected), service providers were grappling with the new systems and workforce became a second order issue, making it difficult for Coordinators to garner support and build sustainability in the final months of their appointment. Compounding this was the fact that Coordinators were employed on short contracts and needed to be thinking about finding a new position towards the end of their appointment. Some Coordinators, understandably, moved on before the end of the twelve months in order to take up longer term positions, causing disruption to the program of activity.

Ipswich has had the advantages of a core group of motivated players in the workforce space, the success of the Roadshows and a high level of networking in the disability sector, driven by Council, government departments and disability advocates. This has provided opportunities for continued work and discussions on NDIS workforce issues. In Mackay, once WorkAbility Qld ceased, the networking also collapsed. However, with half of the potential participants yet to register for the NDIS, there is a growing recognition by service providers that the labour pool is small, and it is difficult to compete with mining jobs. This may motivate some collaborative workforce activity in coming months.

Given that NDIS participants are registering at a slower rate than expected, the workforce issues may take time to bite in some areas and will continue to be felt for years to come. This highlights the importance of focussing on ways to ensure that established organisations with a role in workforce development, with existing and ongoing relationships with employers and a continuing program of events (Councils, Government Departments, NDIS systems) are able to assume the workforce mantle, including by aligning activities to achieve mutual benefits.

Administrative arrangements

Consortium members recognised that while generally effective, the approach takes a lot of effort to ensure it runs smoothly. They said that two aspects of the administration could have been strengthened:

- Firstly, the administrative arrangements governing the work of the consortium could have been more clearly articulated from the start. When issues arise such as personnel changes within organisations or different understandings around responsibilities, it is important that there are transparent, agreed processes and paper trails to refer to. This will assist in maintaining strong collaborative relationships and high quality work

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[25] Outpost Consulting (2017) *Baseline Evaluation Report* indicates that the top reason people decide to work in the disability sector is because they 'want to make a difference'. Outpost Consulting (2018) *Disability Traineeships* research also found that 'wanting to do something meaningful through work' was a key driver for choosing a career in disability.

- Secondly, at the regional level, staff are autonomous and have a limited budget. Project team meetings provide a monthly opportunity for coordinators to get together. Nevertheless, greater support in specialised areas, for example marketing and event coordination, and a budget for implementing activities would have improved outcomes and job satisfaction.

Data and monitoring

The project could have benefited from greater attention to data collection and analysis for each activity undertaken by the project. This does not need to be onerous. A few headline indicators for each activity is all that is needed. The measures should be discussed and agreed with partners in the activities, particularly any that are contributing funding towards the activity. More rigorous tracking of activity outcomes provides information for continual improvement and also allows funders to demonstrate outcomes and advocate for more funding.

It would be also be useful to feed information back to regions on what elements of their action plans were implemented, outcomes from these and priorities for ongoing collaboration and action.

Articulating a clear role

WorkAbility Qld is a useful 'catch-all' for issues and projects related to developing the NDIS workforce. However, some stakeholders indicated that they would like to see a clearer articulation of the consortium's role and agenda for the coming year. This will allow these stakeholders to better align and coordinate their work with WorkAbility Qld and to understand who is responsible for what.

Priorities for the future

Summary of progress against key 2017 themes

	On track
	Still work to do
	Strong theme - priority focus required

	2017 theme	Priority	2018 status
1	Service providers are working towards enhancing participant choices		Standard practice for service providers to offer choice and systems and processes established to facilitate good matches. A minority of workers persisting with the 'old way'
2	There is a common understanding of the changing attributes required of workers		The attributes of required of workers are well-understood by all. However, consistency of worker and people that 'like their work' is increasingly important for participants.
3	Recruitment processes are being revamped to attract a broader range of workers to the industry		More innovative recruitment methods are being used successfully but some providers still rely on resource-intensive traditional methods
4	The WorkAbility Networks are engaged and action-focussed		Local WorkAbility Networks have concluded. Some relationships and activities have been maintained. A sustainable avenue for workforce discussions in each region is required
5	Skill development needed for leaders and coordinators		Managers roles have become more complex and change management skills are required
6	Health care and aged care skills do not translate to disability support work		A stronger focus on disability placements in the Individual Support qualification is needed

7	Rural and remote areas need attention		Rural and remote participants not currently being serviced
8	Workforce conditions need to be maintained to retain a stable workforce		Concern about workforce conditions has increased. Focus needed on retention of good workers.
9	Skill development is required in non-disability specific areas		Employability skills are still needed, including the need for a 'positive, engaged disposition'. But there is also still a gap in NDIS specific knowledge.
10	More engagement with CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups to address cultural needs		Workers with Indigenous and CALD backgrounds and specialised services for these groups are urgently required.
11	The RTO relationship is important to ensure quality training		There is less concern about RTO connections as service providers focus on in-house training and employing unqualified workers. But there is more potential to build relationships to improve training quality, particularly through work placements.
12	Allied health shortages are a key concern		Major shortages in therapists remain, particularly in regional areas. Efforts to engage with health departments in universities have potential.

Key areas for focus for the future

Support the development of the independent contractor workforce

The sole trader/independent contractor workforce is underdeveloped in Queensland. These workers can provide a fast response to gaps in the market, particularly in domestic assistance services which are emerging as an area of need. As the NDIS is bedded down, more and more participants will become 'self-managed' (currently 16%)[26], and will be looking to employ their own staff. As casualisation increases it is likely that people will turn to self-employment, offering their services to multiple providers and families in order to put together a full-time schedule. Opportunities for professional development, marketing and networking will assist this cohort meet participant needs.

1. Focus on staff retention

Participants have indicated that a degree of stability in staffing is usually more important than choice. But the labour market tightens, it will become increasingly important to keep skilled and experienced staff in the industry. Employee concerns with wages and casualisation takes away from job satisfaction.

Work is needed to encourage service providers to have retention strategies in place. Employees are looking for opportunities for supervision, debriefing and support. As management roles are cut, demands on frontline workers are increasing. NDS has begun work on 'high performing teams' to assist workers to operate without the layers of management that were previously available. There may be opportunities to collaborate more with universities, practitioner organisations and/or unions to offer workers the support and learning they need to remain motivated and improve their practice.

2. Training priorities

WorkAbility Qld has received funding to deliver a comprehensive skills package, in the NTSSS. This evaluation has highlighted a number of areas for action within the NTSSS:

• Pre-employment activity to support people to have the employability skills needed to work in the industry

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[26] COAG Disability Reform Council Performance Report – Queensland 31 March 2018

- Attracting young people to the industry through school-based training

- Promotion of skill sets as a foundation pre-requisite for employment and a step towards full qualifications

- Skill development in NDIS specific areas, such as ethos and practice, knowledge of services and referral pathways, legal and ethical responsibilities, and working with people with psychosocial disabilities.

- Working closely with the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission to understand and influence requirements for qualifications, training and experience

- Promoting awareness of the NTSSS across government agencies so it can be used as a mechanism to solve NDIS workforce supply problems

3. Focus needed on employment of people with disabilities in NDIS work

There is an important opportunity to improve employment of people with disability in the NDIS sector. WorkAbility Qld could work more closely with the Disability Employment Services sector to understand if there are systemic barriers to placing workers in the industry.

There may also be an opportunity to engage the social enterprise sector in providing services to NDIS participants, particularly domestic assistance services which are in high demand. The Queensland Government has committed strong support to building the social enterprise sector to create jobs, promote inclusion and increase supplier diversity. [27] WorkAbility Qld has an opportunity to contribute to these objectives while growing and diversifying the NDIS workforce.

4. A workforce to support Indigenous service provision, particularly in rural and remote areas

In a market-based system, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants have particular challenges in accessing services. Many live in rural and remote areas which lack infrastructure and have thin markets. Many would like to have the choice to receive services from an Aboriginal service provider. With the NDIS now available in the Far North Queensland region, there is an opportunity for WorkAbility Qld to work with the NDIA on how best to intervene in thin markets to ensure an appropriate workforce is available to provide services. DATSIP in Mackay has been working with Aboriginal service providers to assist with NDIS registration and brokering employment for Indigenous jobseekers in NDIS services. This work could be prioritised in other regions. There are also opportunities to make use of specialist Indigenous Group Training Organisations and Australian Apprenticeship Support Network providers to source and train Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers for the industry.

5. A workforce to support CALD communities

People from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse communities are seriously underrepresented in the NDIS. One of the reasons given for this is the lack of diversity of staff and/or cultural competence of staff. A strategy has been released by the NDIA and tools and resources have been developed through a Queensland Government program to improve cultural capacity under the NDIS. WorkAbility Qld can support this work by promoting these tools and reaching out to diverse communities in attraction and recruitment activities.

6. Myth-busting work is ongoing

WorkAbility Qld's efforts to dispel myths and present a realistic and positive picture about work in the disability sector is one of the most widely appreciated aspects of the strategy. But there is still a long way to go. Service providers consistently request assistance with promoting the industry as a flexible and fulfilling career choice.

7. Allied health workers in regions

Allied health is still coming up as a major shortage area with participants experiencing long waits and regional service providers unable to find skilled staff. Occupational therapy and psychologists with understanding of

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[27] Queensland Government (2018) Queensland Procurement Policy

intellectual disability and autism are professions in demand. There is an opportunity for Workabilty Qld to work with universities and professional associations on attraction strategies to engage this sector of the workforce.

8.   Use of work placements as recruitment channel

Organisations that have moved away from online advertising and engaged with RTOs to provide work placements as a 'try before you buy' recruitment strategy are delighted with the results. They not only have an opportunity to poach the best workers, they also benefit by influencing training system. Promotion of these non-traditional recruitment channels by WorkAbility Qld will improve the quality and reduce the churn in the workforce. Ultimately, the relationship with RTOs (and schools) can help build a training culture in an industry that lacks one.

9.   Address blue and yellow card processing delays

Processing delays with criminal history and working with children checks has had an unnecessarily detrimental impact on workforce supply.   We understand that there is an awareness of this issue in the relevant areas of government and efforts are being made to address it. WorkAbility Qld may need to continue monitoring and advocating on this issue because until it is resolved the strategy's attraction and recruitment activities will not realise their potential.

10. Linking with Commonwealth initiatives

The Commonwealth Government has recently invested significantly in activities to support job growth in the sector with a focus on regional and rural areas, through its Boosting the Local Care Workforce initiative. Coordinators will be on the ground in Townsville, Rockhampton, Brisbane and Gold Coast. Importantly, the program also provides one on one business assistance. WorkAbility Qld can leverage this work by coordinating activities, sharing information and resources and building on successes achieved through in this program.

11. Review the administration and Governance structure

The structure and frequency of WorkAbility Qld meetings has worked well to date to get the strategy bedded down. However, the number of layers to the governance structure means the meeting schedule can be intensive. There was not enough information available to the evaluator to definitively recommend a streamlined governance structure, but the Steering Committee might wish to consider the benefits of combining the Statewide advisory group with the Stewardship Group, and establishing time-limited action-focussed subgroups to advise on particular areas of work as needed. This approach may reduce any duplication and maximise use of knowledge and skills.

It would also be worth considering the inclusion on the Consortium of a voice representing the participants and families who are direct employers of NDIS workers. While people with disabilities and their representatives are active contributors to the Statewide Advisory Group, they are not explicitly represented on the WorkAbility Qld consortium, which comprises four key players in the 'disability industry'.

Sixteen percent of people with disability are now self-managing their NDIS package in Queensland, and thus directly employing staff, making self-managed participants (and their families and intermediaries) a significant employer group. The Independent Advisory Council to the NDIS has recommended that this sector be supported to grow. As they do, it is likely to cause disruption to the current disability service market as people become less reliant on specialist disability services.[28] This sector of the industry is likely to have different recruitment and training needs and different perspectives than the members of the current consortium.

Another issue that needs attention is the monitoring of outcomes. To some extent, WorkAbility Qld has developed organically to meet needs as they emerge. Nevertheless, for the next stage it would be useful if there were timeframes, outcomes and measurement approaches built in to each activity. Where other organisations are involved, any metrics they need for accountability purposes should also be taken into account.

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[28] Independent Advisory Council to the NDIS (2017) Self Management: value and strategies for growth

12. Ensure sustainability

It is increasingly apparent that the workforce issues continue to build over time, partly due to the lag in participation in the scheme. It is recommended that WorkAbility Qld develop a strategy for sustained assistance to the industry, including by:

- ensuring each region has an avenue for ongoing workforce conversations and collaborative troubleshooting, for example through standing items on Interagency meetings
- aligning place-based work with other place-based activity occurring in the sector to leverage effort and build sustained relationships between players
- disseminating data and analysis from WorkAbility Qld's new 3-year research project to help regions keep abreast of supply and demand issues
- considering exit and transition approaches for activities, such as transferring leadership, where appropriate, to more permanent government programs and agencies.

Conclusion

WorkAbility Qld is an innovative model for addressing industry workforce needs. It has made significant headway in raising the profile of NDIS workforce issues and implementing practical strategies at both regional and statewide levels to improve supply and capability. In the final year of its core funding, a stronger focus is needed on workforce retention strategies and developing a capable workforce in rural and remote areas. As the project matures, structures and processes will need to be in place to enable sustainability of activities and efforts beyond the life of the core funding agreement. The skills and research projects that the consortium has secured provides such opportunities for building longer term, systemic improvements to the NDIS workforce.

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