# WorkAbility Queensland Evaluation

# Stage 1 Report

WorkAbility Qld Steering Committee

January 2017

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# Introduction

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

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

Outpost Consulting has been commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the Strategy to provide information to assist the Strategy's Steering Committee make future policy, program and investment decisions in relation to the NDIS workforce.

The evaluation is progressing in three stages:

*Stage 1*: Foundation work to set up the evaluation along with undertaking a scoping study in Townsville, where the strategy is already underway, to understand what data is available and the best approaches for data collection, as well as any lessons for the roll-out in other locations.

*Stage 2*: Collection of baseline data at two sites (Ipswich and Mackay) during their readiness stage (constituting the baseline fieldwork)

*Stage 3*: Following the baseline collection with outcome data collection after 18 months of implementation including sourcing and synthesising a range of secondary data sources to understand the community level impacts of the strategy.

Stage 1 of the evaluation is now complete. This is the Stage 1 report to the Workability Queensland Steering Committee. It details:

- Success factors of the Workability approach

- Challenges and risks

- Advice for other sites

- Considerations for the implementation of the evaluation

It also includes the data collection tools to be used for Stages 2 and 3 as attachments.

# Methodology

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. It is focused on mapping out or filling in the 'missing middle' between what a program or change initiative does (ie its activities or interventions) and how these lead to the desired goals being achieved. A theory of change facilitates understanding amongst the stakeholders of the link between strategy and outcomes and allows us to identify what data needs to be collected to measure the outcomes.

The Workability Strategy theory of change was agreed by the Steering Committee in October 2016 and formed the basis for the development of the evaluation plan which was agreed in by the Steering Committee in November 2016.

Following on from this foundation work, a scoping study was undertaken in Townsville. The North Queensland region commenced an early transition to the NDIS from January 2016.The Workability Strategy has been operating in the region since April 2016.

The Townsville scoping study involved:

- Review of documentation relating to the North Queensland region and activities undertaken under the auspices of the Workability Strategy including the Local Workforce Profile, the North Queensland Workability Action Plan, the Coordinator's monthly reports and guidelines on related projects.

- Six face to face interviews with individuals involved with the Workability Strategy:

- The Local Workability Coordinator

- An NDIA Senior Manager

- A service provider

- A Registered Training Organisation

- An Advocate

- Four representatives from the Department of Employment

- A focus group with the North Queensland Workability Network, involving 15 participants including service providers, government representatives (DATSIP and Department of Employment), RTOs, a GTO, Job Actives and an advocate.

- An online survey of Network members. Ten responses were received – 6 employers, 1 RTO, 1 GTO, 1 government and 1 advocate. Half of the respondent had been involved in the Network for more than 6 months (4 since the beginning) and half had joined more recently.

# About the WorkAbility Strategy in North Queensland

The Workability Strategy in North Queensland began with the development of a local workforce profile and the appointment of a Local Workability Coordinator early in 2016.

On 27 April 2016 a forum was held to bring together all the relevant stakeholders in the region. The forum had the aim of raising awareness of the NDIS and workforce issues involved, introducing the Workability Strategy to the region and providing an opportunity to begin conversations about NDIS workforce issues and potential solutions. At the forum, participants were invited to nominate to be part of an ongoing Workability Network to be convened by the Local Workability Coordinator.

Within two weeks of the Forum, the first Workability Network meeting was held. These meetings have continued to be held every 3-4 weeks, sometimes more frequently when intensive work is required. There are about 20-30 organisations involved with the Network and a core group of about 10 individuals who have been involved for a long time and consistently attend meetings. Most members are Senior Managers within their organisation, with some field officers and program officers.

The first task of the Network was to develop an action plan to focus the work of the Network on meeting workforce demand in the region arising from the NDIS. The plan was structured around three elements - workforce supply, workforce capability, and workforce utilization. The plan was launched on 1 July 2016.

During the second half of 2016 the group has been working on implementing the plan. There was a change in the Coordinator position in August. After a handover, the new Coordinator has been steadily working with the group on building workforce supply through various engagement activities with employers and jobseekers, particularly through meetings and information sessions. Individual members take leadership on different aspects of the Action Plan and sometimes working groups are established to drive specific activities.

A major activity of the Network during this time has been organising and convening a local Careers in Disability Expo. The Expo held in Townsville brought together jobseekers with employers to promote NDIS jobs and provide an opportunity to match job seekers with employers. It attracted almost 700 participants including 29 employers.

Other work the Network has been involved in includes developing and disseminating marketing material, including a promotional video; consulting on and providing input on training content and materials; monitoring NDIS implementation through seeking out and sharing intelligence; supporting the establishment of networks in smaller regional centres, particularly Mount Isa; contributing to relevant conferences and events, including by partnering with Project-Able (NDS project for students promoting careers in the care sector).

# Findings

## Overview

The place-based structure of the Workability Strategy is greatly valued by those involved. Having a local coordinator facilitating a local network allows stakeholders to work on practical, local solutions, while building community capacity.

A major motivation for members in joining the group is to develop professional networks and share ideas with others in the industry. Individuals are also hoping that through their involvement in the group they will help raise the profile of the disability industry and help the Townsville region prepare for the NDIS. Some hope to develop a better understanding of what impact the NDIS will have on their organization or program and some are looking for ways to recruit staff.

Most people involved feel they are benefiting from the networking and information sharing opportunities provided by the group and a having supportive environment for addressing local NDIS workforce issues.

*Support - a feeling of cooperation. Very good*

*Opportunities for networking and hearing from 'other' service providers has been very valuable.*

Drawbacks identified by members were having time to attend meetings, the withdrawal from the group of a number of service providers diminishing the value and some frustration around trying to plan when the workforce needs are not yet clear.

Most respondents to this study believe that the group has made some good progress during 7-8 months of operation, particularly in terms of shifting thinking, fostering cooperation between stakeholders and raising the profile of disability within the community. However, there is a general understanding that the changes required to the workforce will take a long time to implement, well beyond the duration of the Workability strategy.

*The discussions enhance our ability to plan, to consider services from a participant perspective and to consider how best to provide a service.*

*Bringing service providers together in a positive way and connecting to employment and training.*

## Success factors

### Skills of Coordinator

Many respondents commented on the importance of the excellent leadership of the two Coordinators who have driven the North Queensland Workability Strategy. Strong facilitation skills, commitment and objectivity. It was seen to be an advantage that the Coordinators were 'independent' and 'unbiased', that is not affiliated with any particular service provider.

*Excellent facilitators, they're not patronising. That's really important.*

*The leadership of the Coordinators is very important to getting activities done.*

### An agreed plan to work to

Having the first task of the Network being to develop an Action Plan has been an important way to focus the work of the group. Getting the Action Plan ready and approved within a short timeframe was seen to be critical to shore up momentum. Ownership of the plan by the group was also important for ensuring commitment to implementation.

Subgroups have been able to take leadership in implementing aspects of the plan where they have particular interest or expertise. Much of this work can occur outside the main Network meetings.

The conceptualization of the plan around workforce supply, capability and utilization was also seen as useful.

*Pulling together a strategy quickly. It's an impressive product –it helps get buy in.*

*Following the plan and getting activities done.*

*Ownership of the plan is integral to the health of the network. Otherwise you'd be pushing up hill.*

## The right mix of membership

Having a wide mix of stakeholders involved in the Network has allowed the cross- germination of ideas and helped different sectors understand each other. For some sectors, the Workability Network meetings are the only opportunity organisations have to discuss and share ideas related to the NDIS. The feeling is that the group should include a large proportion of service providers (employers). Achieving this engagement takes considerable effort.

Getting the right individuals involved is also important. Respondents advised that members should be in strategic positions, managers and decision makers, rather than those involved in recruitment who may be more focused on outcomes for an individual organisation or program. Committed, hard working individuals brought considerable value.

> *For JSAs and RTOs this is the main forum for discussion.*

> *If you get high calibre people, you can squeeze a lot out them.*

> *I think there are good numbers and a reasonable mix but sometimes the individual organisations forget that the purpose of the group is to align with the goals of the group rather than the goals of the organisation they represent.*

> *I didn't know anyone in the room before Workability… without the platform of Workability collaboration would not be possible.*

> *Bringing employers together with Job Actives is a major achievement… Job Actives are engaged now. They're thinking strategically about partnerships and getting an understanding of the industry.*

## A focus on the big picture

Effort to foster strong relationships and networks within the group has helped build cohesion and a common cause. The Network developed a Group Agreement which outlined expectations of members and how they would work together. This was thought to be useful in establishing the right approach from the outset.

Maintaining a focus on the needs of the participants, the industry and the region, rather than the needs of individual organisations, is critical to achieving the Network's goals. A number of respondents pointed out that several organisations dropped out of the group early on because they couldn't see enough value for their organisation. This concerned some members but others were happy to have a cohesive 'like-minded' group focussed on the bigger picture.

While community and industry benefit is the objective, a by-product of individuals working intensively together for a purpose has been the establishment of new mutually-beneficial business relationships.

> *As the industry changes, relationships become far more important. The group gives all players an opportunity to have a chat and work out how they can help each other.*

> *There's an understanding that being competitive isn't going to help the industry - we want the industry to be successful in the end.*

> *Our biggest outcome has been collaboration in the sector to focus on benefits for the community…. It's the gold out of the whole thing.*

> *As the penny dropped that it was a working group to serve a greater purpose, not a network, it weeded people out and we were left with those with like-minded values.*

## A high profile public event

There was common agreement that the Network's biggest achievement has been the Careers in Disability Expo. As the first event of its kind in the region, it provided an opportunity to raise the public profile of the NDIS and highlight the sector as a real career option for local jobseekers.

While the employment outcomes from the Expo are yet to be determined (an evaluation is planned), members of the Group had high praise for the concept and the implementation. Workability members took in active role in the organisation, including providing funding support, and took pride in their achievements. This practical work together for a tangible outcome, gave the group real purpose.

It's important to note that despite the high levels of in-kind support, the Expo was not cheap to run and may not be a viable option for all communities. The Group sought additional funding from other sources to employ an event coordinator to assist with organisation.

Professional marketing materials were also developed through separate government funding.

*The Expo was one of the most effective ways to find out about our industry and for employers to meet people in person.*

*The Expo was amazing, the turnout, the energy, the commitment from the Workability group. It was great to see something tangible.*

*The wonderful event that was the expo was a major highlight for our sector and the commitment behind the scenes to improve opportunities for people with disabilities.*

## Engaging employers first

The North Queensland Workability Strategy has recently turned its attention to some of the smaller regional centres, particularly Mount Isa. With an understanding that maintaining employer engagement is not easy, they have taken the approach that the most important priority is to get employers on-board, other stakeholders can come later. To ensure strong engagement by employers a small group of members started with a series of individual meetings with organisations to explore the workforce issues and provide information about the opportunities through Workability.

From there, a group of local employers was formed to work through their workforce issues. This group was later supplemented by other stakeholders for cross-sectoral discussions. In this way, the employers' workforce issues were considered first and the other stakeholders with commercial interests, such as RTOs, GTOs and Job Actives are brought in to respond to the identified needs.

*You need to spend a lot of time on individual engagement with employers, then pursue working together and collaborating. Many employers don't realise that they've got the same problems.*

# Challenges and Risks

## Limited time for funded facilitator role

The North Queensland Network is very concerned about the sustainability of the group once the Coordinator funding expires in February 2017. There is a hope that some engagement will continue but momentum to continue working on the action plan may suffer. There is particular concern that the communication and ideas exchange that occurs outside of meetings will be lost.

*Individual groups work well separately but there's not a lot holding them together to ensure common goal – without a facilitator, the whole framework is in jeopardy. The whole is greater than the sum of its parts*

*We need an impartial leader. It's a grave concern moving forward. A year is not enough. It needs to be a couple of years to make it hold for the NDIS. In the first 12 months we're still processing everything.*

*I'm not sure that the group will be able to continue without a coordinator.*

## Reaching the workers

There still appears to be significant uncertainty within the disability workforce about the NDIS and what it means. While it is important to have senior representation on the Workability Network, there is additional work to do to involve all levels of organisations in conversations about career opportunities under the new model of service provision.

*Conversations are happening at the CEO/Board level. None of the messages filter down below senior management, to workers. Support workers don't understand NDIS. There's lots of negativity.*

## Engaging employers

Employer input is vital to making the Workability Strategy effective yet employer engagement is an ongoing challenge. While Workability North Queensland has had good engagement by 5 or 6 committed employers, there are many more who are not part of the regular conversations. Twenty-nine local employers attended the Careers in Disability Expo, but the majority of these do not attend meetings.

*The hardest part is employer engagement. It's a continual effort.*

*Sadly, numerous service providers have withdrawn from network which has consequently diminished its value to me*

## Timing recruitment activity with increases in demand

There have been significant delays in approving NDIS plans in the Townsville region. This has made it difficult to time recruitment activity. Employers do not want to be attracting workers when the market is not ready. However, they need to be poised to recruit as soon as the demand starts flowing. One suggestion is to develop a regional talent pool through a building a database of potential candidates that could be accessed by a variety of organisations. This would allow employers to quickly fill roles with the right candidate and to identify quality candidates for the future.

## Recruiting on values and personal attributes

An issue for all employers, and the system generally, is that disability work requires people with the right values. Employers prefer to employ based on a person's personal attributes and their fit with a client, and then provide training to perform the technical aspects of the job.

In the context of the NDIS and individualised funding, matching worker personalities to clients becomes even more important. This presents an issue when people complete qualifications, only to find they are not personally suited to a job in the sector. It is a particular issue when people use up their subsidized Certificate 3 Guarantee on a disability course when they might not have the personal attributes required to get a job. There is a suggestion that RTOs should have a role in screening potential students on the basis of values and attitudes prior to admitting them to a disability work qualification.

*We don't want someone spending their Cert III guarantee on something they're not suitable for.*

## Skills to match industry needs

The North Queensland group are also grappling with a number of other workforce training issues. Given the variability in the industry, it is suggested that many more skill sets need to be developed to provide specialised training in particular aspects of disability work. On-the- job training is critical to develop the communication and personal skills required in the roles. The traineeship model is a good fit but most of the jobs in the sector are part-time, making it difficult to employ trainees.

Organisations are also struggling with how they might provide training for staff given the much smaller margins for service delivery under the NDIS. It is likely that the costs of training will mostly be borne by individuals and government subsidies in the future.

## Engaging other parts of the region

The North Queensland group has found it challenging to get regional communities involved and on the front foot with the NDIS. Because most of the plans have been rolling out in the major centres, there appears to be a 'wait and see approach' in the rural and remote areas.

A key issue is ensuring small Indigenous communities are prepared for the change. Disability service provision is currently patchy in these communities and not all services are culturally friendly. Further, the level and scope of requirements is not clear because people aren't identifying as readily.

*The response is 'we'll be right. We'll let you know if we need anything'. It's a head in the sand approach.*

# Advice for other sites

### 1. 'Working Group', not 'Network'

The North Queensland group feels that 'Network' is the wrong way to describe them. They believe a 'working group' is what is needed to get the job done, and that is how they see themselves. Members need to know that they will be expected to take responsibility for and implement specific actions. A focus on the plan and the outcomes needs to be evident from the outset. Networking is a secondary outcome.

A strength of our approach is very clearly identifying that group was "a working group" not a networking group.

### 2. Understand the need for a long-term commitment

Other sites should be aware that although the Workability Coordinator is funded for 12 months, this resource should be seen as simply kicking off a longer-term process. The transition process will take many years and continued work will be required to build an appropriate workforce. Expectations may need to be managed in terms of how much can realistically be achieved in the first 12 months.

*This is not a strategy that can be achieved overnight. It's a major reform and needs time for organisations to develop their adaptability and capacity to be responsive to their customers. Workability have made significant steps forward together however there is still a lot of work to be done!*

*We're not even close to getting there but we've gone some way.*

*This kind of change and strategies required need longer than 12 months to find their feet and be sustainable long term without invested interests swaying the group.*

### 3. Influence policy

Some respondents have advised that groups should not to put important policy issues on the back-burner, in attempting to make some 'easy wins' or solve short-term problems. The local networks have a breadth of on-the-ground experience which can help policy-makers design workable responses to the NDIS. Getting involved in 'policy influencing' needs to be a central part of a Network's action plan.

*You need to get some runs on the board but don't forget about the longer term policy issues… these are the things that will make a big impact. If an organisation has immediate issues, they need to sort that out themselves.*

### 4. Leverage all opportunities

The North Queensland Network has been able to successfully leverage work being done in the region through other funding arrangements. In particular, it has collaborated with the federally funded, ProjectAble, to spread the word about disability careers to students. It has also capitalised on marketing resources provided by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services (DCCSDS) and it has worked with the Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Programs (DATSIP) to ensure information is being effectively conveyed to Aboriginal communities.

*Understand the enormity of the opportunities available to propel under the NDIS*

### 5. Continue to work on getting the right mix

While the mix of participants in the North Queensland Network is considered about right, some gaps have been identified. As noted above, continued work is required to engage employers. Numbers might be strong at the beginning but they do drop off. It is also important to ensure there is representation from people with disability, multicultural groups, Indigenous communities, the mental health sector, the relevant Primary Health Network, small communities within the region and possibly school careers officers.

Having representation at the senior management level is also important to ensure conversations have a strategic focus.

*Start with employers – keep reengaging even if they are not coming to meetings*

*Get 'buy in' at Senior Management/Board level*

### 6. Set the tone early on

It is likely that, in the early days at least, participants will join the Network to find ways to solve their own organisation's workforce issues. While this may be a by-product of the work of the Network, it should be clear that the primary purpose is to solve community and industry issues. Some participants will be nervous about sharing information, conscious that they are in a room with potential competitors. The tone of sharing and collaboration needs to be set early on.

*Build an understanding that being competitive isn't going to help the industry – we all want the industry to be successful in the end.*

*You need a collaborative approach or everyone loses.*

*This is about issues that the industry is facing, not what's stressing me out today.*

*Remembering it's about supporting each other, openly sharing NDIS is a massive shift for everyone. In order to survive open sharing and collaboration is required.*

### 7.   Develop a structure and processes to engage the whole region

It would be easy for a Network to focus only on the needs of the main town in the region as this is where most of the providers will be located. However, every community is different and will have different workforce needs. Smaller centres need their own structures to solve

localised problems. Ideally, these structures will feed in to the central Network to ensure it can help track and manage regional and remote issues.

One suggestion is a hub and spoke model whereby each small area manages its own Network and has representation on the regional Network.  Technological solutions should be available from the outset to ensure remote communities can contribute to discussions.

*It's important that regions have their own connections.*

### 8.   Learn from trial sites

The North Queensland Network identified that they have a lot to learn from the NDIS trial sites in NSW and Victoria. They believe the Workability Networks would benefit from more opportunities for study tours, presentations and conversations with service providers and administrators who have already experienced the changes they are now grappling with.

There was a suggestion that the state-wide network could assist with this.

*There needs to be more of that - study tours and sharing learnings.*

*Inviting speakers from areas that have already experienced NDIS roll out to share their learnings.*

### 9.   Monitor the impact of activities

In designing activities under the Action Plan, thought should be given to collecting data to allow reflection about what worked, what didn't and what impact the activity had. This will ensure that other sites can learn from the efforts and activities can be improved if they are to be repeated. Network members should also be strongly encouraged to use Workforce Wizard so that quantitative data is available for local workforce issues to be analysed and tracked over time.

## Considerations for the evaluation

The Townsville scoping study confirmed that that the approach being taken to the evaluation is feasible and likely to elicit the data required to answer the evaluation questions. Two issues need extra consideration going forward:

• Workforce Wizard – We had hoped to access data from Workforce Wizard to track local workforce trends over the duration of the evaluation. It appears that this database is not being widely used yet in North Queensland. To ensure this data is of use to the evaluation, effort will need to be put into encouraging service providers in Mackay and Ipswich to input data.

• Coordinator term – The Local Workability Coordinator is an important resource for the evaluator in terms of providing relevant documentation, facilitating contact with members of the Network and providing informed and impartial insights and intelligence about the local workforce issues. As the Coordinator role is currently funded for only 12 months, the Coordinator (and possibly the local Network itself) will not be available to facilitate the outcomes data collection, which is due to occur 18 months from the baseline collection. Options for addressing this issue include:

  o Bringing the outcome data collection forward by 6 months. This is not recommended as the full impact of the Workability Strategy will not be evident within 12 months.

- o Identifying another individual within the local Network who is likely to remain in the group for 18 months and would be happy to help facilitate the outcomes data collection. Ideally this individual would be impartial (perhaps a Government representative) and strongly integrated into the local community.

- It would also be useful to undertake an exit interview with the outgoing Coordinators at the end of their terms to hear their perceptions of progress made, challenges and risks to the Strategy and priorities for the future.

## Conclusion

The experience in Townsville has provided some important messages for other Queensland sites beginning their Workability processes. Perhaps the two most salient points to make are firstly to get as many employers engaged as possible, to keep them engaged and to work hard to break down competition and develop an environment of sharing and collaboration and secondly to get an action plan developed quickly, ensure it has ownership and buy-in and encourage individual members to take the lead in getting things done. In this way, the Network moves beyond having conversations, to actively bringing about tangible change within the community. As the evaluation progresses we will gain greater insights into how effective the Workability strategy is in maintaining engagement and momentum across a longer time period.