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Why one size fits all approach to transition in Disability Employment Services hinders employability of young people with physical and neurological disabilities in Australia.

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Abstract

The education-to-work pathways for young people with disabilities are becoming more diverse and lengthier in our post-industrial economy. Furthermore, it is recognized that a multitude of barriers still remain in securing employment at the end of these pathways. In this paper, we focus on Australia's Disability Employment Services (DES) to understand how views of transition in DES policy may be influencing program rules in supporting secondary and tertiary students with physical and/or neurological disabilities in their employability and employment. We do this through critical policy analysis of DES and in-depth interpretive accounts from service providers and advocacy organizations.

Key Words

Young people, disability, employability, transition, participation, education-to-employment pathways

Introduction

So much focus is being placed on enhancing the employability of young people to resolve the unemployment and underemployment experienced by those with and without disabilities. Yet, making positive improvements in one's knowledge, skills and circumstances through education and training (Becker, 2002) do not necessarily equate to employment. Demand side factors such as labor market trends and vacancy ratios, embedded stereotypes and prejudice, as well as inaccessible environments are all significant factors that influence gaining employment – yet these are often downplayed (Clarke and Patrickson, 2008). This has been echoed in international scholarly research with concerns being raised with activation policy when there is a failure to: increase numbers or workforce opportunities and demand (Beatty and Fothergill, 2015), remove

structural barriers (Shakespeare, Watson and Abu Alghaib, 2016), and broaden conceptions of work (Barnes, 2002).

Furthermore, while there is no doubt that personal qualities and human ingenuity can triumph in the face of a tightening labor market, we should be careful about individualizing unsuccessful transitions from education-to-employment. This is particularly the case for young people, as we know they encounter more diverse, lengthy and complex education-to-employment pathways in advanced industrial societies (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). These pathways are more fragmented and unpredictable, and have a greater emphasis on post-secondary education and credentialism (Brown, 2001; Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). These complexities mean it is likely that some young people will experience difficulties in their transition to work.

Young people with disabilities are particularly at risk, as it is well established that they experience universal poor work outcomes (Hemmeter, Kauff and Wittenburg, 2009; Cocks and Thoresen, 2013; Miles Morgan, 2012; Wakeford and Waugh, 2014). They also experience higher rates of unemployment than their peers without disabilities in Australia (Honey et al., 2014; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare AIHW, 2011) and in other OECD countries (Huang et al., 2013; Malviya et al., 2012; Magill-Evans et al., 2009). There are many reasons for low levels of economic participation experienced by young people with disabilities. These include socio-cultural, political-economic, physical, and psycho-social factors.

In this paper, we focus on the intersection of disability and young people to identify assumptions driving contemporary Disability Employment Services (DES) policy regarding education-employment pathways, and how this policy and program rules

influence the support of secondary and tertiary students with disabilities in their transition to employment. This is understood through a critical review of the DES policy and program rules as well as in-depth accounts from service providers and advocacy organizations.

The first section of the paper sets out to affirm the importance of a smooth transition by highlighting the known barriers encountered by young people with physical and neurological disabilities in their transition. This diverse group of young people with varied motor and muscle impairment are the focus of this study as they represent a large portion of young people with disabilities (AIHW, 2011), yet there is little research in Australia about their employment pathways. The second section of the paper provides an overview of Australian Disability Employment Services (DES) and young people. The third section presents research design and methods, followed by the fourth section that presents exploratory findings of the DES policy rules and interpretative meanings of policy influences on supporting young people with disabilities in their transition to employment.

The paper concludes by drawing out the policy and program implications of these findings for secondary and tertiary students with disabilities. These include: expanding the conception of transition in disability employment policy; allow more responsive disability employment services in the different pathways into work; and more understanding of the transition needs of students with disabilities in the tertiary education to work pathway.

Young People with Disability and Transition to Employment

Transition to employment is said to be critical for the economic futures of young adults with disabilities in advance post-industrial economy (Punch et al., 2004; Rusch et al., 2014; Wakeford and Waugh, 2014). A successful transition to work can help towards persons achieving full social and economic participation - a key ethos underpinning the United Nation's Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) 2006. However, it is well recognized that in many countries (e.g. UK-Critten, 2016; USA-Vogtle, 2013) including Australia (Punch et al., 2004; Wakeford and Waugh, 2014), that the right to work (or not to work), choice and employment for young people with disabilities is not well actualized.

Barriers documented in the international literature regarding transition to work are numerous. These include the existence of service systems barriers such as complicated and disconnected government programs and policies (Diaz-Mendoza, Modesto Caballero and Navarro-Cendejas, 2015; Huang et al., 2013; Rutkowski and Riehle, 2009; Vogtle, 2013) and a lack of integrated approaches between systems – education, health and employment (Abbott and Carpenter, 2014; Diaz-Mendoza et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2013; Jetha et al., 2015; Shaw et al., 2006). Other barriers related to transition planning and preparedness, where it was found there was a lack of appropriate work experience programs (Lindsay, McPherson and Maxwell, 2016; Rutkowski and Riehle, 2009); poor career advice within allied health and schools (Abbott and Carpenter, 2014; Diaz-Mendoza et al., 2015; Huang et al., 2013; Shaw et al., 2006; Vogtle, 2013) and inadequate transition planning provided (Lindsay et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2006), particularly for those with life limiting conditions, such as Duchenne Muscular

Dystrophy (Abbott and Carpenter, 2014). Another set of barriers related to low expectations of young people with disabilities to work held by society, schools, families and individuals (Abbott and Carpenter, 2014; Critten, 2016; Lindsay et al., 2016; Novak 2015; Rutkowski and Riehle, 2009; Shaw et al., 2006).

Additionally, it is understood that young people with life limiting conditions, severe impairment, or dual disabilities (e.g., physical and cognitive) often experience poorer employment outcomes due to encountering a multitude of barriers (Abbott and Carpenter, 2014; Huang et al., 2013; Jetha et al., 2015). The extant research shows the identified barriers to employment are complex, and have deep structural and cultural aspects, which go beyond resolving simply through improving ones' own 'employability'.

Young People with Disabilities and Employment in the Australian context

Improving workforce participation of people with disabilities of working age is a key policy priority (policy 3) of the COAG endorsed National Disability Strategy 2010–2020 (2011). This is because Australia has a particularly poor record for employment rates for people with disabilities, ranking 21st out of 29 OECD nations (OECD 2011). Of the one in five Australians with a disability, over 1.3 million persons are of working age (15-64 years) are not in the workforce (Australian Bureau of Statistics ABS, 2012). The employment rate is also bleak for young people with disabilities compared to their peers without disabilities (ABS, 2012). Between ages 15 to 24 years, the labor force participation rate for young people with disabilities is 56.6%, whereas for their peers

without a disability the rate is 70.8% (Australian Human Rights Commission AHRC, 2016).

A tight labor market presents real challenges for people with a disability as employers tend to be more discriminating in terms of who they hire and even when they are aware of the importance of having a diverse workforce, they often prioritize gender or ethnicity, rather than disability (AHRC, 2016). A lack of awareness and pro-active disability action plans on the part of many employers means that more emphasis will need to be placed on demand side strategies in the future, not just on supply side employability factors. Part of this demand-side failure relates to what Goggin and Newell (2005) describe as the disability apartheid, where the government of the day does not accommodate for impairment thus disabling the individual. Although people with disability often face personal challenges living with their disability, societal and workplace attitudes are often negative and employer activity is typically minimal (Galvin, 2005).

The National Disability Strategy (Commonwealth of Australia, 2011) notably recognizes the important relationship between demand and supply side strategies as well as the educational outcomes and economic contribution for young people with disability. As outlined in National Disability Strategy, Key Policy Strategy 5.5 (Commonwealth of Australia 2011: 58), the strategy emphasizes a need to ‘Identify and establish best practice for transition planning and support through all stages of learning and from education-to-employment.’ Additionally, the National Disability Strategy also clearly identifies that improving transition to work and increasing economic participation of young people with disabilities requires the intersection of, and improvement in, all policy

areas. This requires policy interventions that seek to change attitudes towards disability—improve employment rates, remove barriers and disincentives, and improve accessibility of buildings, transport, information and telecommunications.

Effort to streamline roles and responsibility between federal and state government in the education-to-employment pathways has been attempted through efforts such as *Roles and Responsibility in Education Issues Paper* as part of the Reform of the Federation (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014) (Children with Disabilities Australia CDA, 2015; Wakeford and Waugh, 2014). This is all good, except the responsibility for education, and thus transition, still rests with state and territories. As such there is a lack of national coordination and responsibility for post-school transition policy and programming (CDA, 2015; Wakeford and Waugh, 2014). While this may be problematic in some policy areas, it has allowed some states to be innovative, such as in inclusive education and transition (ARACY, 2013). Then again, for students with disability in other states where such innovation options are not available, it means there are inequalities. Inconsistency of disability services across Australia was a criticism identified in the Productivity Commission Report (2011).

In addition to coordination, how key service systems such as disability employment acknowledge and respond to the more diverse education-to-employment pathways of young people in advanced industrial societies, will be critically influential in achieving employment success moving forward (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997). This is because services and supports provided (or not provided) within different pathways can influence employment outcomes (Winn and Hay, 2009).

Post School Pathways

For young people with disabilities, access to transition support can depend on location, expectations, experience, opportunities, and capabilities. Traditionally in Australia, many young people with disabilities (particularly those with severe disability or dual disability) have not had open employment presented as a direct option from secondary school (Hemphill and Kulik, 2016; Winn and Hay, 2009; Wakeford and Waugh, 2014). Rather, day programs to develop life skills or Australian Disability Enterprises (ADE) (support employment) have been the common post-school option pathways (Hemphill and Kulik, 2016; Winn and Hay, 2009; Wakeford and Waugh, 2014). As such there is not a smooth transition from these post school pathways to open employment. This is articulated by Hemphill and Kulik (2016) who noted the supported (sheltered) to open employment pathway faces many barriers, including policy barriers, that mean people with a disability, often with intellectual impairments, can remain in sheltered employment situations. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), which will come into full effect in 2019, may help to open up more opportunities for those eligible for NDIS. However, how this will occur is still evolving as the program rolls out and the interfaces with other programs like ADE and DES are being resolved.

The post-secondary education to employment pathway is another changing space that in some ways is opening up more for young people with disabilities, as entrenched views are being challenged through disability advocacy, anti-discrimination laws and human rights such as CRPD 2006 (OECD 2011). This includes participation in Vocational Education Training (VET) programs (Cocks and Thoresen, 2013) and post-

secondary education at universities and technical and further education institutions (TAFE) (Lindsay et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2006; Wheelahan et al., 2012).

However, managerial and marketized approaches to social services and income support in Australia over recent decades has influenced the logic of many programs, including the VET system (Wheelahan and Moodie, 2010), DES, and associated rules and guidelines around income support payments (Lantz and Marston, 2012). This has had wide ranging effects on how young people with disabilities transition to employment.

This effect is no more evident than in DES policy. The national “specialized program” for people with disabilities for employment services is a quasi-market model of employment services that operates on the basis of contestability and funding for outcomes, similar to the mainstream employment services system in Australia, JobActive. The program is underpinned by the 2006 welfare to work policy changes, which targets and regulates new recipients to Disability Support Pensions (DSP). DES and income support policies address the rules of eligibility to benefits by enforcing ‘work availability’ requirements for receiving benefits, and implement sanctions for non-compliance (Lantz and Marston, 2012). Young people have been particularly targeted by this approach, as evidenced in 2014, where all people under 35 years on DSP were reviewed to determine work capacity (see 2015 Disability Support Pension Recipients Compulsory Requirements guidelines).

To this end, the DES service system plays a significant role in shaping the transition to open employment for young adults with disabilities, along with attitudes and practices within this system (Hemphill and Kulik, 2016; Lantz and Marston, 2012; Winn

and Hay, 2009). Given the diversity and complexity of education-employment transition, the current disability employment context, and underlying managerialism and marketization thinking, a deeper analysis of DES policy as to how it understands and views education-employment pathways for young people with disabilities is warranted.

Methodology

Our empirical approach takes a critical lens to understanding how young people's education to employment transition is understood in disability employment services policy. A critical disability studies lens comprehends the social location of disability and associated forms of disadvantage and oppression, such as ableism and othering (Gleeson, 1999), as well as intersectionality. Intersectionality allows for a multi-faceted analysis of age, disability, class, race, ethnicity and gender characteristics and their impact on life chances (Williams, 2016). In this paper, we focus on the intersection of disability and young people to identify positions and assumptions driving contemporary disability employment services (DES) policy regarding education-employment pathways, young people and how policy and program rules influence the support of secondary and tertiary students with disabilities in their transition to employment and their employability.

We also adopt the position of the interactional model of disability (Shakespeare, 2006), that views the production of disability as an ongoing and complex interplay that exist between people and their sociocultural and physical environments. The interactional model also seeks to address the gap and shortcoming of other models in understanding the complexity of the experience of disability and its production (Shakespeare et al., 2006).

To further frame our analysis, we have drawn on interpretive policy analysis (Yanow, 2011), which seeks to identify not just what the policy and program rules say about young people with disabilities and transition from the policy artifacts, but importantly how it is interpreted in action. The interpretation is understood through in-depth interviews with policy implementing organizations (e.g. DES service providers) and affected citizens' representations (e.g. advocacy organizations). This analytical approach helps to identify interpretative meaning.

The qualitative findings reported in this paper relates to stage 1 of a larger Australian Research Council Linkage project. This stage of the research uses an inductive research strategy to explore to what extent disability employment policy and program rules influences the transition to work for young adults with disabilities, with a specific focus on those with primary physical and neurological impairments. Stage 1 of the study received ethics approval from university and a non-government providers' human research ethics committees.

The research involved in-depth interviews with 22 staff from DES services providers (implementing organizations) and affected citizens' representations (e.g. advocacy organizations) across Australia, using a semi-structured interview schedule. The interview durations were between 45min to 1 hour. Six of these participants also had a form of impairment. The recruitment of participants used non-sampling technique of snowballing, which commenced with advertising the study through our partner organizations' networks - Jobs Australia and Disability Employment Australia (peak bodies in disability and employment). The interviews explored the transition to work for

young people with disabilities across three areas: barriers to transition past and present, solutions/strategies, and needs moving forward at the policy and program level.

In terms of analyzing the interviews, we applied the interpretive policy analysis protocol (Yanow, 2011). This involves a four stage iterative process, which includes: 1. identifying the data artifacts that convey the meaning of the policy (e.g. program rules); 2. identify communities relevant to the policy issue; 3. identify and describe meanings being communicated in the artifacts; and 4. identify and discuss the implications of the policy meaning for affected citizens, and differences in interpretations of the policy by different communities (Yanow, 2011). Coding was assisted through the use of NVivo 11. To help confirm consistency in interpretation of themes and subthemes, two coders reviewed the initial transcripts. A table of themes with sub-themes and descriptions were produced from the iterative process of review and refinement.

FINDINGS

In this section, we begin by identifying and describing the ways in which young people and transition to employment are understood in policy. We then turn to discuss the implications of this policy in practice as understood by personnel from disability employment service providers and advocacy organizations, including creative resistance practice to narrowly prescribed services. We discuss a number of interrelated themes and sub-themes related to narrow conceptions of the pathway to employment and different approaches to supporting secondary school and tertiary students into employment. We begin with the policy positioning of young people with disabilities in DES.

Policy Positioning

DES has a specific provision to support young people with disabilities into employment. This is referred to as DES Eligible School Leavers (ELS) program. The Eligible School Leavers Guidelines (Australian Government, 2017a) for the program govern service provision to eligible young people. Within this document, there is a clear policy intent, eligibility requirements and processes in which DES provider must operate under. This document provides insights into how it views young people with a disability, transition and employment, which we highlight below.

Young People. The policy intent and eligibility requirements makes it clear that DES views young people only as a *secondary school students and who are under 22 years of age*. From 22 years of age, regardless if they are still completing secondary schooling, they are viewed as Adults and are registered through the mainstream DES process (not Eligible School Leavers process), which involves the Department of Human Services assessment of work capacity (ESAT and JCA). This is illustrated in the document (Australian Government 2017a: 4) where it states that: “Adult students who are aged 22 and over who are undertaking secondary school studies through TAFE or similar institutions, do not meet Eligible School Leavers eligibility requirements and must not be Registered and Commenced in DES.” Students must also be full time (Australian Government 2017a: 5):“The assistance provided to full -time student Eligible School Leavers Participants in DES is aimed at identifying and preparing a student job seeker for suitable post school open employment opportunities.”

Transition Pathways. With regard to transition pathways and young people there is only one transition pathway which DES supports for young people – this is secondary school to open employment. This is very specific in the policy intent, which “is to assist

students with significant disability to transition from school to post-school open employment” (Australian Government 2017a: 4). This is reinforced by the statement: “DES may not be the most appropriate programme for students with significant disability if their intention is to continue with tertiary or other study after they finish school.” (Australian Government 2017a: 5). Thus it is clear that DES only views transition of young people straight from secondary school to open employment. Students who may have other pathway components, like tertiary or vocational employment training program, before open employment are not viewed as requiring any specific transition support. This is reinforced in the Mainstream DES guidelines, where “Job seekers who are studying” fulltime are generally ineligible for DES and thus cannot receive DES support to assist with work until they have completed tertiary studies (Australian Government’s DES Eligibility, Referral and Commencement Guidelines, 2017b: 5).

Level of Impairment. The Policy also makes it known that you cannot just be a secondary full time student under 22 years, you must also have a significant level of impairment to be eligible for Eligible School Leavers currently. Limiting the eligibility to young people with only severe disability has only been in place since 2012. The current rules and criteria has many embedded assumptions, particularly how disability and access to employment is viewed. In Eligible School Leavers guidelines, one’s level of impairment is understood to be the “major barriers to open employment” and therefore a severe level of impairment warrants “assistance from a DES Provider to address their barriers and prepare the job seeker for open employment.” (Australian Government, 2017a: 4). This is contradicted in the next page, where language shifts away from disability as the major barrier, to “job seekers” who have “major barriers to employment

and require ongoing support in employment” (Australian Government, 2017a: 5). The language and positioning suggest impairment is viewed as a problem or barrier to employment – rather than multiple structural and social barriers and the intersection of these barriers with a person’s impairment causing disablement. It is this somewhat narrow conception or one size fits all approach to employability and employment support for young people with a disability that requires critical attention, particularly in light of different pathways into employment for young people.

Policy in Action Accounts

To further understand the implication of the narrow view of young people’s transition in DES policy, we turn to the in-depth accounts of the study participants’ who are from DES service providers and advocacy organizations who support young people with disabilities. In this section, we present two key points of influence on young people’s employability and transition emergent through the study participant’s accounts. These are:

1. Changes over time with Eligible School Leavers and the effects on access, service delivery and creative resistance practices
2. Prohibiting DES support to tertiary students in their education-employment pathway.

Both highlight differences in approaches in supporting young people in their education-employment transition within DES.

Changes over time with Eligible School Leavers and the effects on access, service delivery and creative resistance practices

Changes to program rules in service delivery can have intended and unintended impacts on providers and service users. What emerged strongly from the accounts of study participants, is the significance of the 2012 changes in the Eligible School Leavers programs, restricting the rules on who and when DES providers can engage with secondary school students with disabilities. The change has been consistently interpreted as having an undesirable impact on young people, schools and providers. How this impact is understood, is through providers' reflections of the program prior to the 2012 changes:

It was a definite bridging gap and just even doing the pre-work while they were still at school. We'd send consultants in that were working in the classrooms with a group of eligible kids, and then starting to even transition them through to apprenticeship centers because we'd see a vocation that we could help support with. So it was really setting up the transition out of school into a trade. ...It was a seamless process and regionally it was just filling the gap. ResearchParticipant#22-Manager

Participants' also spoke about personal (*psychosocial*) benefits young people receive from good transition support to enhance their employability. This includes being able to experiment with work experience, try things, to develop a career focus in a supportive non-pressure way. This helped to build confidence and self-belief. For example:

I considered looking at their futures and where they wanted to do this.

Yeah, the beauty of doing it in school is that they can stuff up a little,... so we do slowly, slowly, it depends on the individual. But some of that career

development, looking at skills, and aspirations, and those sorts of things, then work experience. ResearchParticipant#8–Manager

These positives were seen to lessen through 2012 program restrictions, such as the tightening of the eligibility criteria (restricted to severe impairment, only) and reducing the timing of when services can engage. For example:

...one of the big differences over the last few years is they actually stopped people coming onboard from year 10 and 11. It's now only year 12s in DES....That's made a huge difference, especially to us and the success of the kids because that made a huge difference when you could work with them in year 10, year 11 and progress them through proper apprenticeships and traineeships....Huge difference. That's affecting kids all over the place. ResearchParticipant#17–Manager

Some participants felt the restrictions are more about cost savings and the deterrence of dual servicing rather than safeguarding young people to ensure they stay in school as long as possible. This premise echoes the policy analyzes, and reflects marketization and paternalism thinking underpinning economic welfare policy (Lantz and Marston, 2012).

Other restrictions while at school include the inability for DES providers to assist young people with after-school job support. This is despite the literature clearly identifying that having an after school job while at school significantly aides young people's employment success (e.g., Hemmeter et al., 2009). This is further supported by study participants who reported early intervention helps their employability by providing

opportunities and experience. This is evident in earlier excerpts, as well as in the excerpt below.

But there's a number of people in the sector have said that people with disabilities are disadvantaged and you really need to - it's from that early intervention perspective - give them every opportunity that they can to get support, to do things like part time and casual work alongside their peers without disabilities. Just to try and give them a bit of a leg up and help them perhaps to compete a little bit more on a level playing field while they're still at school. ResearchParticipant#1–Policy/Project Officer

While the Australian Government's 2016 Disability Employment Services Reform paper acknowledges its restriction for students and its impacts, the proposed changes of eligibility widening seem to do little to address the structural and temporal barriers raised by providers that seem to impact on young people with disabilities in their transition and opportunities to enhance their employability.

Furthermore, the current restrictions within DES are not in line with what international literature reports are needed to assist young people with disabilities in their pathways to obtain open employment. These include: early intervention to build expectation, belief and career thinking (Huang et al., 2013; Rutkowski and Riehle, 2009); specialized transition planning, career advice and development (Lindsay et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2006; Rutkowski and Riehle, 2009); appropriate support with work experience, training and part-time job support while at school (Hemmeter et al., 2009).

Creative Resistance to ESL rules

Whilst the ESL rules are problematic and restrictive in how young people can be supported to develop employability, people from various organizations, including DES providers, reported finding ways to support and enable young adults with disabilities to have successful transitions. We have deemed these workarounds ‘creative resistance’. Creative resistance opportunities for front-line resistance reside in the spaces of local DES offices where these policies are implemented by front-line workers. There are varying responses on the part of professionals as to how they appropriate or resist dominant discourses about devalued welfare subjectivities and ‘strong paternalism’ (Thomas and Buckmaster, 2010).

In these environments, the pathway to employment is tightly prescribed and regulated for both front-line workers and the clients they work with. What we know from classic studies of street-level bureaucracy (Lipsky, 2010) and more fine-grained ethnographic analysis is there are multiple rationalities at play at the local level of policy practice that are mediated by organizational culture, professional discretion and available resources. These variables can create cracks between policy and practice which enable professionals the ‘room to move’ in regard to providing what they consider to be a good service, even when this may be at odds with the dictates of policy.

Some key resistance strategies employed by organizations in this study include: building work attitude and expectation with schools, individuals and families; developing localized partnership models to facilitate appropriate school-based traineeships; as well as work immersion programs at schools to build a career outlook.

Building expectations is a creative resistance practice being employed by advocacy organizations and DES providers. Working with students in schools to break

down negative attitudes and perceptions about disability is identified as a key determinate of a smooth transition (Huang et al., 2013). Participants spoke about the need to provide tailored, individualized focus programs with parents and schools that help to open up conversations about work possibilities. Some of these participants volunteered their time to do these programs, some had specific grants to run awareness projects, while others spoke about the cost to run such programs were taken from the organization's bottom line, outside of DES, as it was realized that such investment was needed given the current restrictions and the impact on young people's transition. It is also acknowledged by participants that schools need help, as they are not experts in this area. This is particularly the case as education-employment pathways open up and more avenues present.

...there's so many different avenues for careers now that's been quite a significant change in probably the last 20 years of being able to, you know, different pathways into tertiary educations or trades or other vocational training. I just don't think career teachers, and nor is it their role, that they can really have the finger on the pulse of everything that's happening out there. They're also housed within the school system; they're not actually working in the workforce as such, so their exposure is limited in that way. ResearchParticipant#22-Manager

Showing what is possible is important as low expectations about people with disabilities continues to be a significant barrier to employment (e.g. Critten, 2016). To overcome this, study participants spoke about the importance of showing young people with disabilities, families and schools what is possible relating to employment. For

example, one participant describes a program that is run in schools to raise awareness of work possibilities with students with disabilities.

A lot of students don't realize that they can actually look for work or go to university or TAFE or whatever. Most of them have been told that you can go to a day service, and that's it really. So our program is to really look at other types of - that they can actually go to TAFE and be employed, and these are the supports that you can tap into if you decide to do that.

ResearchParticipant#7–Policy/Project Officer

The other impacts noted by participants working with schools and students, is that older students have become role models for younger students by showing them work is possible:

Kids in year seven and eight seeing the older kids going out, and the parents are seeing those kids going out and going into normal employment, so they're changing their aspirations about what that young person does. ResearchParticipant#08-Manager

Working earlier with students and their families also helps build relationships. Like the academic literature has identified (e.g. Wakeford and Waugh, 2014; Winn and Hay, 2009), participants also commented about how working earlier helps break down barriers and attitudes, because engagement is not just about providing information it is helping to build relationships and trust.

I think because when you start working earlier you also are building a relationship with the family and the carers. You're not doing that when you're not working with them. Research Participant#18–CEO/GM/Director

Whilst these creative resistance practices to service restriction are helping young people with disabilities build their employability, the problem is that these services are only made possible through the initiatives of staff and organizations that work around or legitimately bend some of the rules to provide good practice. To be truly effective, these practices need to be accessible to all young people with disabilities. A way this can be achieved is through DES recognizing and incorporating these practices into a suite of DES services for school-to-work transition, so they become a core part of the service delivery model.

Different Approach: Exclusion to DES support in Tertiary-to-Employment Pathway

The tertiary education - employment nexus has become a significant pathway for many young people seeking secure and meaningful employment (e.g. Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Brown, 2001; Punch et al., 2004). The post-industrial knowledge economy places higher demands for tertiary education as a factor of employability within this modern workforce (Punch et al., 2004). However, unlike in secondary school where engagement can be made with students in their last year (if deemed eligible) to support transition; it is not until a student completes /exits a tertiary course (this is both TAFE-college and University) that a DES provider can engage with a young person. This DES rule was perceived to be negatively impacting on the possibility of creating a seamless tertiary to employment pathway.

The restriction also meant DES providers are not able to engage with disability support officers and students with disabilities in identifying suitable placements or work experiences during their studies. Study participants' experienced in this area, felt this rule impacted on students' opportunities to develop and maximize their employability. This is reinforced in the interview excerpt below:

Certainly from our end we've found that people don't - either don't get a lot out of their prac placement, because it wasn't very accessible or there were a lot of things they couldn't do. That the university staff in charge of coordinating prac placements, just don't either have enough time, or the expertise to actually liaise closely enough with the placement provider, to sort of nut through...But as you're probably aware, DES providers can't get involved with people doing study, until they've actually finished their course. ResearchParticipant#5-Manager

Only a few participants had either experience with working in this area, or had experience from their own personal encounters with the pathways. These participants revealed that there is a lost opportunity to help young people in the tertiary education -to-work transition, and felt it can be too late once young people have exited the tertiary system:

I think there's a real - an opportunity to work together that is lost.

Because by the time someone's been out of uni for six or 12 months and has had no luck finding a job on their own. They're also on the cusp of missing out on some of the graduate programs that would have been great

for them to get involved in. Yeah, so there's again just a bit of a lost opportunity there, where DES could get involved a little bit earlier. Get to know the person and get through all the paperwork and all the crap that you have to do, before you really get to know the person and know what it is that they want. ResearchParticipant#5-Manager

Furthermore, whilst access to courses are opening up in tertiary education (colleges and universities) they are not necessarily well placed to ensure the best support and outcomes for young people in terms of their employability post university. Interviewees revealed there are still attitudinal barriers as well as a vocational and modification knowledge deficit impacting on student placements. For example:

Everyone else at uni, all my - all the staff at uni were pretty terrible. I had some support from uni, but we just kept on getting knock-backs because the faculty was just not supportive. They - everything we tried just blew up in our faces...Eventually I got-I got kicked out of the course

ResearchParticipant#7-Policy/Project Officer

The findings in this study and the international literature, point to the need for DES to develop a broader understanding of young people's pathways to work (OECD, 2011). There is a real need to acknowledge that young people with disabilities can and do complete tertiary education, and as such, they may need to be supported in this pathway to ensure they are well placed to compete in a competitive market (Lindsay et al., 2016; Shaw et al., 2006).

The above examples demonstrate little acknowledgement of the employment needs of young people with disabilities in tertiary education-employment pathways. More specifically, there is little regard for the role specialized disability employment services can play in providing students and universities with work knowledge to ensure students have access to appropriate placements/experience that showcases their capabilities and opportunity to build relationships with potential employers. There is no acknowledgement of the need to provide disability employment service in the last year, to ensure a smooth and timely support for those graduating. Rather the only acknowledgment of tertiary student in DES policy is their ineligibility for DES whilst studying full time. DES needs to provide a flexible approach to supporting young people whilst in the tertiary-education pathway, so as to ensure opportunities are not missed and to capitalize on programs that can improve employability and lead to employment participation success.

Conclusion

Transition to employment for young people with disabilities is more complex, lengthier and diverse than that recognized in the current policy settings of the Federal Government. The findings from the present study reveal that DES policy and program rules have not kept pace with international trends and best practice. This is evident from the lack of recognition of employability and employment support needs of tertiary students while completing their studies, as well as narrow conceptions of transition and secondary student transition needs. For example, the practices and approaches that have been shown to support a smooth transition in the international literature (Huang et al., 2013; Rutkowski and Riehle, 2009) are not reflected in the program rules of DES.

The findings from this research point to several policy and program implications. The key implication is the need to broaden DES policy understanding of education to employment pathways for young people. This means recognizing that transition takes time in the contemporary Australian economy where paid work is becoming less secure and pathways to work more diverse. As such, transition to employment supports for young people need to be widened in DES. This pertains to revising the Eligible School Leavers program, and generating a post-secondary transition program to reflect this changing reality.

Generating a post-secondary transition program is potentially one way to help to create a smoother pathway. To do this requires removing restrictions in supporting young adults in the tertiary education - employment pathway so they can have a more seamless transition to employment. This would include opening up access to specialized disability employment knowledge to assist with practice placements and graduate job readiness, including awareness of employment assistance processes and timeframes. An important future focus of policy research will be to identify the transition needs of young adults with disabilities in the tertiary education pathway and to explore co-design of tertiary education-to-work service provision.

Revising Eligible School Leavers program rules and supports is another important policy and service provision implication. There appears to be a strong notion of 'deservingness' underpinning the policy through restricting eligibility to only those with significant disabilities. While it is understood that people with severe or dual disabilities encounter multiple barriers to employment (Huang et al., 2013; Jetha et al., 2015), the notion that secondary students with 'less' severe disability are somehow not needing such

help to build employability and finding employment is not supported by the research evidence. Difficulties in transition to work are encountered by young people with various levels of impairment (Lindsay et al., 2016; Punch et al., 2004; Shaw et al., 2006).

Timing is also problematic. It is established that the culture of work or even seeing open employment as a possibility has not been a traditionally strong focus of schools and transition (Winn and Young, 2009). Challenging expectations takes time. The literature highlights that the earlier expectations are established for students with disabilities is best practice (Critten, 2016; Novak, 2015), yet the current DES program rules restrict engagement with students. Allowing providers to help raise expectations early on with schools, individuals and families will help build intrinsic motivation and raise expectations. It was also illustrated how working with young people and their families to help build trust and relationships is also important in breaking down low expectations held by society.

In summary, there are key changes required to enhance young people's transition. These include a need for policy makers to revise the narrow conceptions of transition in disability employment policy to reflect the diverse pathways into employment for young people with disabilities. Additionally, there is a need to allow more responsive and autonomous services to enable organizations to respond to diverse pathways, this includes dual services early in the transition process to improve employability. Third, there is a need for future research on the transition from tertiary education into paid work given the growing participation in this pathway, and the current restrictive policy preventing a seamless transition into disability employment support for tertiary students with disabilities.

This paper has shown there are philosophical and operational changes needed in DES to make the transition between education and employment more seamless for young adults. As it stands, the transition to paid work as defined in DES is too narrow and restrictive, and essentially it is not capitalizing on the opportunities, knowledge and practices that are shown to enhance young people with disabilities in their pathways to employment and their employability (Rusch et al., 2014; Wakeford and Waugh, 2014). Australia needs a change of thinking and practice towards young people with disabilities and transition to facilitate genuine employability with a high degree of self-determination and agency.

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