



A Blueprint for the Future

**Developing Future Directions in Service Delivery to Better Support Community and
Employment Participation of People Having a Disability
In the ACT**

June 2005

Table of Contents

1.0	INTRODUCTION.....	4
1.1	<i>Elements of Good Practice</i>	5
1.2	<i>Consultative Processes</i>	5
1.3	<i>Acknowledgement of Work in Progress</i>	5
2.0	BLUEPRINT FOR GOING FORWARD	6
2.1	<i>Accessibility and Communication</i>	6
2.2	<i>Inclusiveness</i>	7
2.3	<i>Assessment and individual planning.....</i>	8
2.4	<i>Individual Plan Implementation.....</i>	9
2.5	<i>Pathways: Secondary Schools, Training and Further Education.....</i>	11
2.6	<i>Pathways: Employment Partnerships</i>	13
2.7	<i>Creating Opportunities.....</i>	14
2.8	<i>Quality Practice.....</i>	16
3.0	IMPLEMENTATION OF THE BLUEPRINT	18

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With sincere appreciation for your support,

Emily Schindeler

1.0 Introduction

The primary aim of this project has been to develop a blueprint for the future, one which will provide a framework for enhancing the capacity of people with disabilities and varying support needs to participate in employment and communities through the delivery of a flexible, responsive and integrated quality service network. Importantly this needs to be understood within the context of the broader aim that people with disabilities are able to achieve quality of life based upon equal opportunities to work towards their own goals, pursue their own interests and contribute to the community.

It is acknowledged that there are limitations in the scope of this project that have implications for the achievement of a holistic strategy. Two key components, being housing and health related services (such as respite), are not addressed. While these elements were not included, this should not detract from the learning that this project has been able to achieve.

The blueprint set out in this report has been shaped to be consistent with, and to support implementation of, the values and strategies set out in the ACT Government's *Challenge 2014 and Future Directions A Framework for 2004-2008*.

The blueprint itself was developed from the review of the current environment based upon an evaluation framework that linked demonstrated good practice and these planning frameworks. The review process, documented in the separate Mapping and Review Report, included:

- mapping the existing service system, including what is provided, for whom, and the nature of interface and coordination between services and programs. Particular regard needed to be given to the nexus between program, services and activities including, but not limited to, Post School Options and Community Access funded services and programs
- mapping the Australian Government and ACT Government policy and program environment which shapes the service environment
- assessing how this network of programs and services perform with respect to the evaluation framework.

The initiatives recommended in this blueprint are directly derived from the findings of this review and are intended to provide a pathway for moving forward to achieve the broader planning goals and values that underpin them.

1.1 Elements of Good Practice

The elements of good practice which shape this blueprint, and the evaluation framework, were derived from a review of service strategies with proven outcomes, as documented in Australian and international literature. These elements are linked to the ACT Government's planning frameworks. The seven core elements are:

- accessibility and communication
- inclusiveness
- assessment and individual planning
- individual plan implementation
- pathways to education and employment
- creating opportunities
- quality practices.

The blueprint sets out directions for enhancing the quality of performance with respect to each of these elements, with a specific focus on developing future directions in service delivery to better support community and employment participation by people having a disability.

1.2 Consultative Processes

Consistent with the commitment to participatory processes, opportunities were created for people with disabilities, parents and carers, service providers and Government stakeholders to respond to a range of options for moving forward. This included three public consultations, individual interviews and receipt of written submissions. The views expressed in these processes are documented in the Review and Mapping Report. Importantly, there was a general endorsement by those contributors that the issues raised reflect matters that had been previously identified by the community, and do offer a way for moving forward.

1.3 Acknowledgement of Work in Progress

Any review is only able to capture particular points in time. However, work continues throughout this process, including during the analysis of information collected and preparation of recommendations. In this context, some stakeholders, particularly staff of the Department of Education and Training, expressed concern that new or evolving initiatives have not been fully acknowledged. Therefore, this opportunity is taken to recognise that advances are being made in some of the areas identified in the blueprint. This does not however detract from the recommendations, but rather serves to support their pursuit as an accepted pathway for going forward.

2.0 Blueprint for Going Forward

2.1 Accessibility and Communication

“Education and information about the range of disabilities, services and supports is available to people with disabilities, their families and carers when needed” (Future Directions)

The core principles that underpin this element of practice are that:

- people are able to make informed decisions based on full knowledge of their options
- information about programs, services and how to access options is readily accessible to students, families or carers
- schools and service providers are knowledgeable about other options are able to provide information in a timely manner.

In practical terms, this means that agencies have systems for providing information to other providers and the general community as well as for maintaining information about programs, services and options.

While a number of new initiatives are being developed to assist people to access information, and to negotiate through the service, training and education maze, information access continues to be raised as a concern within the consultation process.

Recommendations

To enhance the quality of access to information there is a need to:

1. undertake a targeted research project that investigates the best ways to make information available to parents, carers, young people with a disability and adults with a disability. The aim is to establish a better appreciation of the nature of information, methods of dissemination and presentation that would best meet diverse user needs. The outcomes of this research will provide valuable advice to schools, service providers and Local Area Coordinators.
2. ensure that service providers implement a consistent and ongoing process for promoting information about their service to other agencies or to the wider community. Recognising resource limitations, information promotion should be identified as a core responsibility within funding agreements, and as a pre-requisite to demonstrating equity of access.

3. improve information dissemination by agencies about complementary service providers. Significant improvement can be achieved if information dissemination is considered a service function and is recognised within service performance assessment framework.

2.2 Inclusiveness

“As a person with a disability I should be able to:

- *access assistance to plan in advance for life transitions such as leaving school, starting employment, beginning a relationship, leaving home, getting older and growing old*
- *involve my family and other people who support me in planning to assist me to develop options for my post school life.” (Challenge 2014)*

The core principle that underpins this element is that programs and services are designed and delivered:

- on a holistic basis
- within a framework of life transitions
- in an environment of shared understanding of roles, rights and responsibilities
- in a way that they come together seamlessly, and consistently, irrespective of jurisdictional origin.

In practice, this means that there are well-established inter-agency referral systems, strong inter-agency relationships, knowledge of the work of other agencies, and processes for working effectively together. This includes operational arrangements and agreements that facilitate a holistic approach.

Importantly it also recognises that transitions may occur at different times and many times for an individual. It may involve a number of types of transition, from high school to college, from college to the community (whether to work, to further education, training or community access), or to independent living. This means that there needs to be a capacity for people to access assistance with transitions whenever they occur as part of a whole of life process.

Recommendations

The quality of the current environment can be significantly enhanced through:

4. continued development of the relationship between community access, business and employment assistance services. There is a need to establish positive incentives for agencies to adopt a more integrated approach to individual planning, work readiness, work experience, personal development and community access activities. The development of inter-agency protocols will facilitate such cooperation within the context of protection of individual rights and confidentiality. Such protocols will be most effective if they are developed through a joint planning process that focuses on exploring ways in which collaboration can add value to all services, to the individual and ensure quality practices.
5. opening up the opportunity for a person with a disability to multiple list with employment assistance and job network providers, in order to widen individual opportunities through cross service program access. This would require a review of the current program prohibition of multiple listings.

2.3 Assessment and Individual Planning

“As a young person with a disability I should be able to:

- *access opportunities to develop my capabilities and my potential and to contribute to the community*
- *access relevant and timely information about services and developments that may assist me to maximise my participation in community life*
- *be clear about my eligibility for government funding.” (Challenge 2014)*

The core principle that underpins this element of good practice is that the assessment and individual planning processes empower the individual to set their own goals. Processes support:

- self determination
- participation
- informed choices
- transparency and accountability.

In practical terms, this means that eligibility and assessment processes are transparent and accountable. Such processes need to be timely, reviewed, focus on skills and abilities, be inclusive and participatory. Importantly assessment and planning processes need to generate mutual understandings

While most education, employment and community access providers undertake assessment and planning processes, there is little evidence that there is a systemic framework, which ensures that such plans come together on a holistic basis.

Recommendations

The quality of the current practice can be significantly enhanced through:

6. initiating a dialogue between education providers (secondary and tertiary), employment assistance services, community access providers and registered training organisations to promote better understanding of the nature of information being collected through individual assessments, why it is collected, and to consider options for streamlining and integrating such regimes in a manner which benefits the individual.

2.4 Individual Plan Implementation

“Individuals and families are supported to plan for their future and develop sustainable pathways to realise their goals and aspirations”. (Future Directions)

The key principle that underpins this element of good practice is that implementation of individual plans should assist individuals to achieve their goals through:

- working as a team across service or agency boundaries
- adopting practices that encourage partnerships
- seek options that best match individual goals and pursuits
- provision of support, being able to work flexibly, mediating and promoting continuity.

In practical terms this means that there are:

- strong linkages between employment, training and education providers
- protocols or systems for working collaboratively
- processes for matching the individual with work and employer, training or education provider.

Equally, it is essential that planning and implementation occur within the context of a continuing learning philosophy, which encourages and is responsive to, the individual's growing ability to identify and achieve their goals and aspirations.

However, the extent to which implementation processes are achieving individual goals is difficult to determine. The recommendations below are intended to provide a vehicle for addressing this knowledge gap.

Recommendations

7. It is recommended that an inter-agency initiative be established to facilitate the development of a practical tool for monitoring, documenting and evaluating individual outcomes, with particular regard to the achievement of individual service plans, personal goals and client satisfaction.

This would provide excellent learning in terms of current practices as well as providing valuable evidence of the outcomes being achieved. This will complement the primarily quantitative information currently collected as part of standard reporting requirements.

8. Strategies that promote greater awareness of the full ambit of available ACT Government and Australian Government programs which may assist a person with disabilities to access assistance and support to participate in education, training, employment, and personal development, should continue to be pursued.
9. Forward planning for transitions will be greatly facilitated by working within the evolving student planning processes, and ensuring that:
 - students, parents and/ or guardians are involved in a coordinated career planning process which explores options and opportunities, leading to an explicit decision
 - confirmation is made of any funding or other resource eligibility requirements in accordance with Centrelink, if relevant
 - there is early negotiation between student / parents and preferred outcome provider, whether this be a further education provider, mainstream or specialist training provider, employment or community based program provider
 - early identification of relevant short term, or longer term, support requirements, and the most appropriate programs for meeting these requirements

- early preparation of an applications for relevant assistance and advice on likely funding
- ongoing collaboration in preparation for transition, including preparing for any modifications, technology or personal supports, needed to access further education or the workplace.

This early planning will provide a better basis for the Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services, and other funding bodies to prepare forward budgets, for identifying any additional resource requirements and for applicants to receive a timely response to their application.

2.5 Pathways: Secondary Schools, Training and Further Education

“As a young person I should be able to choose to continue my education if I want to and plan and pursue my school goals” (Challenge 2014)

This element of good practice involves preparing for transition in a manner that is:

- person focused
- adaptable
- facilitated through quality cross sector partnerships.

In practice this requires access to relevant curricula, training and experience, and provision of support for both the student and those with whom they will be working.

There have been a number of new and developing initiatives within the ACT Department of Education and Training, as well as within individual high schools and colleges. Much of this work is ‘in progress’ and has the capacity to significantly enhance the quality of pathways, which can be created.

Recommendations

To enhance the quality of practice and support continuing improvement in pathway creation, it is recommended that:

10. Whilst acknowledging work being undertaken to date, opportunities for fostering better linkages between Individual Learning Plans, Student Pathway Plans and Transitional Planning processes should be further investigated.
11. It would be advantageous to develop a pool of specialist career advisers who are knowledgeable about the range of options, including non-disability specific options, available to students with disabilities. This includes knowledge of strategies that may improve access to mainstream educational and employment opportunities as well as assistive technologies that would facilitate such access.

Providing advice to non specialist teachers in mainstream classrooms, special education providers, as well as students and parents, the specialist career advisers have the potential to provide an important role as a conduit for information sharing, promoting the positive outcomes achieved in individual colleges and high schools as well as within the employment sector.

Importantly the position description for the specialist career adviser will identify the provision of advice to students with disabilities, parents and teachers as a core responsibility. This in turn provides a valuable model for, and is consistent with, the need to respond to the needs of a highly diverse student cohort.

12. Where a student requires a personal care worker to enable participation in further education, such support should be considered a priority when determining the allocation of any grant funding.

Curricular, Vocational Options and Work Experience

13. Students with disabilities would benefit from increased access to pre-vocational, vocational and education options. The development of system wide monitoring regimes would assist in documenting the extent to which access is improved and the strategies that are achieving positive outcomes.

14. Enhanced linkages between the Vocational Education and Special Education arms of the Department of Education and Training may facilitate access by students with disabilities to a wider variety of vocational choices.
15. To enhance the quality of work experience for students with disabilities in grades 9-12, employment assistance providers should be resourced for, and contracted to, work with schools and students in planning, management and support for work experience. This relationship may be extended to include traineeships, apprenticeships, work readiness programs and prevocational training. The options for including Student to Industry Program (SIP) in this arrangement should be investigated. *However, consistent with the independence of high schools and colleges in the ACT, the option for pursuing such an arrangement would be voluntary.*
16. Consistent with the ACT Government Inclusion Program and the Australian Government Local Community Partnerships program, it would be worthwhile to continue to actively promote projects that work with local employers, high schools and colleges, and employment services in establishing resilient partnerships in work creation.

2.6 Pathways: Employment Partnerships

*“As a young person I should be able to access training and skill development and work experience and find and maintain employment, and to develop a career if I want to.”
(Challenge 2014)*

“All persons have a responsibility to cooperate and coordinate well with other players in the field” (Challenge 2014)

The core characteristic that underpins this element of good practice is the presence of porous boundaries between sectors. This is essential to facilitate processes that allow matching the individual and the training, personal and skill development, and employment options. In implementation, this should be reflected in practices that ensure:

- individualised job search activities and training
- processes for matching interests and skills
- ongoing practical support clients and employers
- opportunities to move fluidly between options in a client focused manner.

Recommendations

To enhance the potential to achieve this environment, it is recommended that:

17. Consistent with Recommendations 13 and 14, most education providers and employment assistance agencies support the view that early intervention with students planning to transition to employment is beneficial. Additional resources to support this process would enable this to occur on an ongoing basis.
18. Provision of employer and employee support both before and during a job placement can have a significant impact. There is room to consider more proactive approaches to employer support as a means to increase the range of employment opportunities, to promote greater understanding and to foster awareness of the options that can be created through job design.
19. A joint approach, across jurisdictions, programs and sectors, is adopted to enable the provision of, and participation in, annual clinics in assistive technology . Given the rapid changes in this field, and the wide range of expertise within the ACT, a joint initiative will create an opportunity to provide the most up to date information and advice on technology use to teachers, parents, students, employment assistance providers, employers and further education providers.
20. A joint Government, cross portfolio approach to clarifying existing ambiguities about responsibilities for acquisition, training, and ownership of assistive technology, would be useful for parents, students, employers and education providers.

2.7 Creating Opportunities

“A diverse range of flexible support models is available to meet the changing need of people with disabilities, their families and carers.”

“Service options are flexible and respond to identified need” (Future Directions)

Agencies that demonstrate leadership in creating opportunities are characterised by:

- fostering a culture of inclusiveness
- working creatively to generate new opportunities for participation
- assisting training, education, employer and recreation providers to identify new ways of working with young people with disabilities.

In practice, this requires agencies to engage with the wider community, to be willing to work flexibly and to adopt a philosophy of continuing learning. It is important to acknowledge that any organisation may operate consistent with good practice without necessarily pushing the boundaries of practice. This element is specifically concerned with the ability to enhance performance across all the elements of good practice by seeking out and developing new ways of working.

Recommendations

To value add the current service system is recommended that:

21. The community access and day program framework would benefit from expansion to offer a full day program which more proactively assists people with disabilities to transition to further training, employment, education, community and the take up of valued roles. This would benefit not only young people transitioning from school, but equally adults with disabilities who participate in such programs.
22. There is national and international evidence that awareness raising and information programs that reach out to employers, in all sectors, are effective in generating a more positive work environment and in developing potential new employment options. This has been particularly effective when working with local employers. A national information package that promotes greater understanding and raises awareness of the contributions of people with disabilities to the workforce has been developed. Accordingly, a 12 month initiative would provide an opportunity to build on this and:
 - draw from practice based evidence and local experience working with employers in adopting flexible ways of packaging work which needs to be done and which is consistent with the abilities of the worker
 - work with a number of students preparing to exit school, people with disabilities who have been out of the workplace but involved in other community access activities, and current clients with employment or training service providers

- involve a range of employers in different sectors and businesses to explore job design in a range of work environments
- explore opportunities for application of the Supported Wage Subsidy and Wage Subsidy Scheme in encouraging participation by employers in generating sustainable employment options
- review learning from this process with an aim to produce practice guidelines for other practitioners as well as employers to enhance opportunities through job design.

23. There are a number of people with disabilities who would benefit from access to business services who are currently unable to do so. Accordingly, there is a need to consider strategies for enhancing access to existing business services, and to develop new models for business services that are designed to specifically to create a pathway to additional training and employment opportunities.

24. There is a need to more effectively reach out to adults with disabilities who have not previously been able to engage in employment, training, community programs or social activities, and who need assistance in accessing such opportunities. Such support needs to parallel the types of assistance available to young people preparing to transition from school.

2.8 Quality Practice

“Services that support people with disabilities, their families and friends are flexible and innovative, and aim for, and continue to be at world best practice standards.

Services that meet professionally recognised standards of quality” (Challenge 2014)

The core principles that underpin this element include:

- maintenance of quality records
- implementation of quality policies and procedures
- adoption of systems that protect client rights.

In practice this requires program providers, service providers and individuals to be involved in processes which monitor and review achievements with respect to individual outcomes, service outcomes, and program outcomes. At the same time, there is limited capacity with current reporting regimes to document outcomes or to undertake a reliable forward planning needs analysis. Recommendations set out below are intended to address these information gaps.

Recommendations

To enhance the quality of information that can advise future planning, it is recommended that:

25. Service providers should be encouraged, and assisted, to work collaboratively to establish mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating client outcomes, with particular regard to individual goals. By establishing such a management tool, invaluable learning could be gained with respect to service design, service planning and program development.
26. There is a need to establish an agreement with service providers for the systematic recording of the number of applicants who are unable to be assisted, the nature of referrals, and the period that an applicant remains on a waitlist before accessing a service. Where an agency does not currently maintain a waitlist, they should be encouraged to do so.
27. Agencies, including education and training providers, community access providers, employment assistance services and support providers, should be encouraged, and assisted to, develop a more collaborative approach to service planning and delivery, with particular regard to the development of systems which will facilitate integrated service responses.

3.0 Implementation of the Blueprint

The ACT planning frameworks set out in *Future Directions* and *Challenge 2014* provide the policy framework required for moving forward. However, implementation will require a whole of Government approach. This means a collaborative approach between the Australian Government and ACT Government in the planning, funding, delivery and review of programs and services.

Although there is a demonstrated need for additional resourcing in some areas, the blueprint is equally focused on improvement in the dynamic and strategic relationships between the different parts of the overall service system. In short, it calls for better integration at all levels and between different elements of the service system. This will require a cooperative approach involving Australian Government and ACT Government service, program and fund providers, funded agencies, and private providers.

Implementation will also rely to some extent on an attitudinal and perceptual shift to address the siloed view constructed through the various sector, departmental and funding programs. It is acknowledged that there are examples of collaboration, such as between high schools or colleges and employment assistance providers, business services and community access providers. However this is not characteristic of the system as a whole. Implementation will require then that all stakeholders are willing to extend current practice and to take on a more active role in the adoption of more collaborative approaches to how individual programs, agencies and funding arrangements are managed.

This can be achieved through a range of initiatives, but importantly it is essential that the value and priority given to change is embedded in the structures and management systems which guide future planning and service provision, in education, training, employment, community participation and individual supports (both financial and non financial).

Towards this end, it will be essential to continue to develop the program planning, service planning, management and delivery arrangements in a manner which puts in place the needed agreements, protocols and performance indicators, that can facilitate and promote implementation.

Finally, implementation will require a genuine commitment to monitoring and review, putting in place a documentation process needed to demonstrate the outcomes being achieved, and establishing a vehicle for continuing improvement to meet the benchmarks set out in *Challenge 2014* and *Future Directions*.