



The Royal
Society for
the Blind

Inquiry into the administration and purchasing of Disability Employment Services in Australia

Submission to the
Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committees
by The Royal Society for the Blind of SA Inc.

ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

The Royal Society for the Blind of South Australia Inc (RSB), a quality endorsed organisation, with over 125 years of service, is the primary provider of a full range of specialist rehabilitation services to over 12,000 South Australians who are blind or vision impaired.

The RSB has been providing Government contracted employment services as a specialist provider for the past seventeen years, continually maintaining a high standard that have resulted in rollover contract offers.

In addition, the RSB provides holistic support to our clients through our range of in-house services, including an Adaptive Technology Centre, Low Vision Centre, counselling services, occupational therapists, guide dog and mobility services, plus recreation and leisure activities.

1. Suitability of the ratings model

The DES Deed states the aim of the DES program in the clause below:

- 74.1 The objective of the Program Services is to help individuals with disability, injury or health condition to **secure and maintain sustainable employment**. The Program Services will increase the focus on the needs of the most disadvantaged job seekers and will achieve greater social inclusion. The Program Services will **boost employment participation** and the productive capacity of the workforce, address Skills Shortage areas and better meet the needs of employers.

One of the elements of the DES program is “Job in Jeopardy” which assists currently employed people at risk of losing their job due to their disability maintain their employment, thereby boosting employment participation. However there is *no* part of the ratings model which provides *any* statistical credit for achieving this within the six month period of the Job in Jeopardy program.

Our Services

Adaptive Technology
Community Education
Counselling
Employment Services
Guide Dog Service
Industrial Services
Library Services
Low Vision Centre
Mobility Services
Outreach Services
Peer Support
Print Alternatives
Recreation & Leisure
Systemic Advocacy

Adelaide

Knapman House
230 Pirie Street
Adelaide SA 5000
GPO Box 1855
Adelaide SA 5001
Office 8232 4777
Donate 1800 644 577
Email mail@rsb.org.au

Corporate Office

254 Angas Street
Adelaide SA 5000
8223 6222

Industrial & RSB Guide Dog Services

11 Blacks Road
Gilles Plains SA 5086
8261 4121

Regional Offices

Mount Gambier
Noarlunga
Port Augusta
Smithfield
Victor Harbor

www.rsb.org.au

The Royal Society for the
Blind of SA Inc.



As a smaller provider with a caseload of approximately 200 clients – with 25-30% of our clients at any given time being supported through Job in Jeopardy – we have found the lack of statistical credit in this area paints an incomplete picture of our performance against the stated aims of the program.

Instead, statistical weighting is given to timeliness measures in KPI 1.1 and 1.2 which appears inappropriate (as these are unrelated to the program objectives), and also redundant, as service quality is measured in the quality KPI 3.

The major flaw perceived in the star ratings methodology still appears to be the expectation that all providers must 'tick all the boxes' to achieve the highest star rating score. This is clearly stated in the 'Understanding DES Star Ratings' document on DEEWR's website.

Separate regressions are calculated for each performance measure so, for example, the impact of factors such as the age or disability type of participants may be higher for one performance measure but lower for another.

Once performance has been calculated separately for each performance measure, an overall performance score is worked out by combining them using the published weightings. These weightings reflect the relative importance of each measure to overall performance.

For example; a provider that *only* achieves Full Outcomes for their clients seems to be disadvantaged by the model because the provider is not achieving Pathway Outcomes at 13 and 26 weeks. Each of them is worth 5% towards the total ESS star ratings.

Similarly, if a provider can settle a client into sustainable employment within the six months of the initial employment – or Job in Jeopardy program – then they will not need to utilise Ongoing Support (worth 15% of the ESS star ratings).

It would seem that the model actually encourages and rewards providers both financially and statistically if they 'drag out' their support to clients in order to ensure that they reach the Ongoing Support stage. ***Providers that don't do this are penalised.***

2. Impact of the tendering process on DES staff and clients

The decision to tender in excess of 80% of the DES ESS business is illogical, unproductive, and unnecessarily costly.

Even discounting the perceived flaws in the star ratings model mentioned earlier, the fact that so many providers achieved a 3 star – average – rating is to be expected. After all, if the majority of providers were 'high performing' at a particular level, then that would become the new 'average' as providers are being assessed against each other, not an arbitrary score set by DEEWR. This is confirmed in the aforementioned 'Understanding DES Star Ratings' document:

Unlike previous star ratings, DES star ratings are based on five rating bands of 1 to 5 stars in whole star steps only. There are no half stars. Providers performing well below the average will achieve a score of 1 star, whilst providers performing well above the average will achieve a score of 5 stars. **All scores are relative, so any particular score does not represent attainment against an absolute benchmark.** Rather, it could be expected that as performance rises over time, the level of performance needed to attain any particular rating will also rise.

DEEWR is effectively deciding that achieving 'average' performance, against moving and constantly improving performance by all providers, isn't satisfactory.

DEEWR is fully aware that the tendering process is extremely disruptive to staff and inevitably results in reduced performance levels. Once the tendering process begins, the priorities of DES providers become split between trying to meet their contractual client requirements while also trying to obtain and produce material to justify why they should continue to operate as a DES provider.

3. Impact of the tendering process on smaller providers

Submitting a tender requires a significant level of work, and providers are not on a level playing field when it comes to submitting a tender.

Smaller providers simply do not have the same surplus of human resources to enable them to undertake the tender process to the same level as larger providers. The level of work required to research and accurately compile data to produce a tender will result in disruption to services delivered to clients and a poorer quality tender submission from smaller providers.

4. Financial Impacts

With in excess of 80% of DES Providers having to re-tender for business in 2012, this has serious financial impacts for both Government resources and Providers alike. For DES Providers the tendering process creates an extreme drain on financial resources, particularly smaller organisations. This will also impact, albeit for a short period, on service delivery to clients.

For Government resources, in particular DEEWR, tender evaluation systems will have extreme financial burdens on Government budgets allocated to Disability Employment Services.

5. Tendering and delivery of specialist services

Specialist DES providers, such as the Royal Society for the Blind of SA (RSB), have invested a considerable amount of money to ensure that people who are blind or vision impaired are able to independently job search in their employment kiosk.

There are no other vision specialists currently operating in South Australia, and generalist DES providers lack the resources, expertise and reputation that the RSB has accumulated in the 127 years it has been operating, to provide employment and other essential services to people who are blind or vision impaired in SA.

6. Summary

The RSB *strongly* opposes the structuring of the current re-tendering process and the overall impacts this purchasing arrangement will have on service delivery to clients and small providers who at 3 stars, according to DEEWR's own performance rating, *are meeting* their contractual obligations.

ADDENDUM

To further support this submission we have included two case study examples.

The first is an example which demonstrates our intervention strategies and supports under the Job in Jeopardy program. The second example is a typical job placement for the RSB which was achieved through the combined services of the RSB to ensure that appropriate adaptive technology was in place for the placement to be successful.

Job in Jeopardy example – Jamal's story:

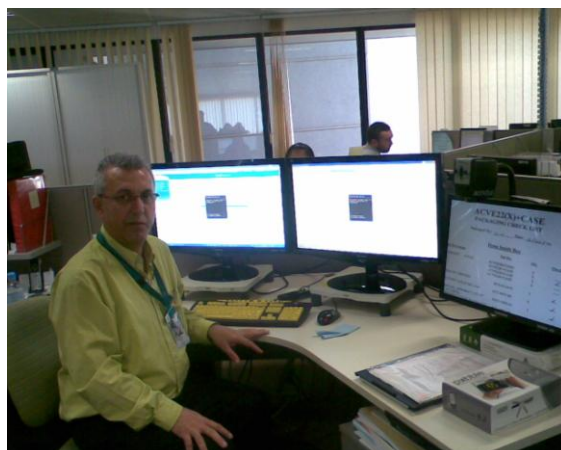
Jamal had been working as a Test Analyst for Centrelink since 2006, before his eye condition (Blepharoconjunctivitis) and his deteriorating vision put his job in jeopardy.

Because his role involves testing the system environment for Centrelink staff, Jamal uses dual monitors and is required to view the content of both screens at the same time. This meant that simply adding magnification software wasn't an appropriate solution for him.



Jamal's desk – before

Following an assessment, RSB successfully applied to JobAccess for funding for two large 27" monitors, as well as a large font, high contrast keyboard and desktop magnifier, so that Jamal could clearly see the technical specifications he was required to reference which contained extremely fine print.



Jamal's desk – after

Job placement example – Jacqui’s story:

Jacqui is a mother of four who had spent the previous 20 years raising her family. Jacqui has an eye condition known as Retinitis Pigmentosa, which causes her to have a great loss of peripheral vision, leaving her legally blind.

Since Jacqui first made contact with the RSB’s Employment Services, she had gone from doubting her ability, to being able to contribute in a workplace in a paid capacity after successfully gaining a Business Administration Traineeship.

This was achieved by working closely with one of RSB’s experienced Employment Consultants to identify gaps in her skill levels, then undertaking computer training in large print software provided by RSB’s Adaptive Technology specialists. She also received intensive one-on-one job coaching and job search activities.

Buoyed by her Employment Consultant’s belief and confidence in her, Jacqui’s hard work paid off resulting in gaining the traineeship.

An Adaptive Technology assessment was arranged which identified the workplace modifications equipment she required to successfully complete her training. Funding was arranged and the equipment was installed in her workplace.



Jacqui’s Electronic Magnifier



Jacqui (right) with her employer

Summary:

These two examples are indicative of the many South Australians who are blind and vision impaired who have been assisted into, or to maintain, sustainable employment through the efforts of RSB’s Employment Services team.

The RSB achieves results through their; Employment Consultant’s intervention strategies, an understanding of eye conditions and their effects, and a sound knowledge of the adaptive equipment available.

Intervention strategies are implemented for each individual’s circumstances and include liaising with their employers, installing adaptive technology, providing training where required, and delivering workplace support until the client is independent once again.