



29 August 2003

The Secretary  
Standing Committee on Employment & Workplace Relations  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Committee Members,

**RE: EMPLOYMENT - INCREASING PARTICIPATION IN PAID WORK**

I refer to the Honourable De-Anne Kelly MP Chair's Letter of 28 July 2003 seeking input into the inquiry into increasing participation in paid employment.

The Royal Society for the Blind of SA Inc. (RSB) is the primary provider of employment and rehabilitation services for people who are blind or vision impaired within South Australia. Currently the RSB provides services to over 9,500 people.

The RSB wishes to raise the following issues to be considered by the Committee during the above named inquiry:

- Transition and vocational guidance;
- Work experience;
- Early intervention;
- The Equipment Subsidy Scheme (ESS); and
- An even playing field for supported employment.

**Transition and Vocational Guidance**

The RSB believes that more resources and co-ordination should be directed towards the transition from secondary school to employment or tertiary studies.

One initiative to assist in this would be the creation of a database of suitable career options for people who are blind or vision impaired. The database should also be able to be accessed by this group using adaptive technology. This database could also include cameos of people who have severe vision impairment and who have achieved successful careers.

This database will provide both vocational guidance, information and encouragement for people who are blind or vision impaired.

We therefore recommend that a database be created to ensure that high quality vocational guidance is readily available to assist people who are blind or vision impaired in making long term successful life choices.

### Work Experience

The RSB currently operates, using its own resources, a pool of adaptive equipment, that enables people who are blind or vision impaired to participate in work experience in order to prove their ability and gain valuable work experience.

To convince future employers that our clients are capable employees, we need to demonstrate how the person performs and competes within the work environment.

We therefore recommend that resources are made available to create a pool of specialist equipment, that is available to enable people who are blind or vision impaired to participate in work experience.

### Early Intervention

The bulk of existing employment programs are targeted towards the long term unemployed or people with a severe disability.

The RSB believes that this is a false economy and that it is preferable to maintain people in existing employment or to find suitable alternatives prior to them losing touch and becoming part of the "Long term" unemployed.

Currently there are programs that exist to facilitate this, however both employers and potential users of these schemes require education as to their existence.

We recommend that resources be allocated to educate employers and people who may qualify for these programs, to be aware of their existence. This may be included with our recommendation for an educational database noted above.

### The Equipment Subsidy Scheme (ESS)

Currently the Federal Government's ESS for people with disabilities provides adaptive equipment and workplace modification to those who have been successful in gaining employment. However, funding for the ESS has not increased at the same rate of as the cost of adaptive equipment. It also fails to provide ongoing support for equipment maintenance or software upgrades. This is essential to ensure the ongoing employment of people who are blind or vision impaired.

We therefore recommend that the ESS guidelines are changed to allow for:

- A maintenance and software upgrade component; and
- An increased limit in instances where the provision of specialist equipment is justified beyond the current levels.

- An even playing field for supported employment

The RSB has operated for over 100 years a manufacturing workshop in which it has paid its' employees who are blind and vision impaired a productivity based wage. Other supported employment enterprises pay their employees a fixed nominal rate rather than equitable wages based on productivity. This results in the RSB competing in an unfair environment.

We therefore recommend that all supported enterprises throughout Australia either pay productivity based wages or equalisation be achieved through the re-allocation of Commonwealth funding.

I would be pleased to meet with the committee to further discuss these matters and demonstrate the need for the above recommendations to be implemented. Please do not hesitate to contact me on (08) 8223 7170.

Yours sincerely

**ANDREW DALY**  
**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**