



The Disability Employment Centre of Excellence

Consultation response –
November 2023

With over 25 years of experience, Interact Australia (Interact) work to promote social inclusion, health and wellbeing by empowering people with a disability to achieve their full potential.

Interact is a values based not-for-profit organisation. We champion and support people with a disability in their choices, offering a range of person-centred supports, matched to meet your unique circumstances and individual needs.

Interact is proudly part of IntoWork Australia. Founded in 1983, IntoWork is the leading national provider of Employment, Skills and Education, and Support services that support economic and social participation. The IntoWork Group is a trusted partner providing contracted services on behalf of Commonwealth, State, and Local governments. We also provide other services directly to employers, industry, and individuals on a fee-for service basis.

Our network means that we have on the ground local knowledge, plus the resources and infrastructure to invest in our people.

The Interact approach is person-centred and choice-driven, to match you to services that support the goals you have identified. This personalised hands on approach provides flexible and tailored supports for your unique circumstances.

Our genuine care for the wellbeing of our customers and communities, and our commitment to empowering you to achieve your goals, means our team will go above and beyond to achieve the best possible outcomes for you.

Our dedicated, motivated, and dynamic team, deliver services focussed on your choices. Through experience and a common purpose, we work together to provide inclusive and responsive services.

Being a national provider of ESS and DMS Disability Employment Services contracts, Interact provides the following in support of the development of The Disability Employment Centre of Excellence (The Centre).

More information on Interact can be found at: <https://www.interact.com.au/>

The Need for The Centre:

Interact supports the core need for the Centre in driving increased economic participation to individuals with a disability. Research shows economic participation drives further independence in individuals' lives, promoting higher quality of life and enabling their full potential.

The support to the Disability Employment Services sector is welcomed. The Centre will be pivotal in supporting the future professionalism, benchmarking of services and the ability for the sector to learn from research and findings, driving higher service delivery across the industry. Further to this, The Centre will provide an independent body to support best proactive and advocacy through an equal access approach connecting all relevant stakeholders. Collective co-design initiatives can be explored, and true placed based strategies will be delivered through the access and support of the Centre.

Interact recognises the various complexities for consumers – employers and participants, to navigate the various programs available and support access. With the increased sharing of knowledge about best practice, this will lead to positive improved outcomes for people with a disability.

Functions and Effectiveness of The Centre:

Interact believes that the functions of the Centre need to have agility and scope to support changing landscapes and policy direction within Disability Employment Services. Qualitative and Quantitative measures would be applied to ensure the core functions of the Centre meet the underpinning objective in driving higher economic participant for people with a disability.

The Centre needs to be positioned and led by an independent intermediary as a key to ensure ensuring the most equal, effective, and engaging outcomes. Independence of operation to allow for evidence-based criticism and debate for policy making. It will also promote cross-sector partnerships between research, public and private sectors, employers, and end users.

Interact supports the following core functions implement for the Centre, recognising the establishment of these will see reduced duplication of services and tools. In the development and implementation of these functions, the need for lived experience insight will form critical frameworks to govern these.

- *Access and Inclusion:* Equal access for all stakeholder groups. Providing confidence to navigate the system and promoting choice and control. Enables a central and consistent promotional campaign for Disability Employment Inclusion
- *Professionalisation Hub:* Driving professionalism of sector staff delivering contemporary Disability Employment Services training and service delivery development. The professionalisation of the sector will see continued development of benchmarks in best practice.
- *Innovation Hub:* Encouraging a platform for grant funding supporting pilots / trials to be tested that challenge the status quo of Disability Employment Services. The Centre would then promote evidence-based employment trials with large employers and provide results and learnings (EG: The Careers Pathway Pilot)
- *Research Hub:* Driving recommendations of industry best practice through the promotion of local and international research that recommends industry best practice. Supporting collaboration within the Disability Employment Services Ecosystem, in engagement of research projects.

Disability Employment Services is a competitive contract model of service delivery to drive employment outcomes for individuals with a disability. The choice and control of an individual enables the ability for service provision nuances. The success of the centre will be its ability to bridge the gap between the scientific research and the providers ability to implement best practice into operations based on the resources they are required to execute.

Access to The Centre:

Interact supports the need for The Centre to provide opportunities for stakeholders to understand what is currently being delivered in areas of research, innovation, and learnings from People with a disability finding employment opportunities including through the promotion of best practice and case studies.

The Centre should be supporting the Disability Employment Eco-System including the following:

- People with a disability, their families, and their support networks
- Employment Service Providers
- Employers
- Supported Employment Services
- Disability Advocates and Peak Body Representatives
- Education Pathways Providers (RTOs)
- Complimentary Employment or Disability Providers
- Government Agencies

Capability and capacity building:

Aligning to the core functions of The Centre, capability and capacity building of both stakeholder and employers will be a pivotal part of the success of impact The Centre brings.

Interact identifies the following actions that can promote the increase in employment participation for people with a disability:

Increase Employment:

- Centrally promote disability confidence training rather than the duplicated disability awareness training to employers that multiple providers do.
- Influence government on procurement targets and allow advocacy and support for workplace inclusion.
- Drive best practice models and share pilot outcomes and methodologies outside contracted measurements.

Increase Capability and capacity:

- Reinvest in the stakeholders around building capability and capacity (human resource development – providing the skills, information, knowledge and training to enable providers to perform effectively).
- Drive a destination for lived experience professionals to access resources / share resources and be engaged in initiatives.
- Connect stakeholders to bring value to the table in an equal manner and facilitate solutions thinking. In doing this, shared outcomes are promoted.
- Promoting institutional and legal framework development to enhance capabilities of service delivery.

Interact looks forward to the engagement opportunities of the Centre. The development of a Disability Employment Services Centre of Excellence has been a long-awaited initiative and one that needs to be implemented prior to the anticipated 2025 DES contract commencement. This timeline will ensure that The Centre is best placed to support the sector in the procurement period. Interact is committed to continuing to support the development, implementation, and utilisation of The Disability Employment Centre of Excellence.