



A New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes: Interim Report of the reference Group on welfare Reform to the Minister for Social Services

Arts Access Australia (AAA) welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the “New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes” report. Our comments are informed by the experiences of Australians with disability who access the arts, their vision of how access to arts and culture through employment can be improved and the role that the arts can play in transforming employer attitudes.

Summary of Recommendations

- Education and training of actors with disability and disability theatre companies be supported over the long-term.
- Government work with us to establish quotas for the numbers of actors with disability employed in Australia annually.
- Incentives be offered for the employment of artists with disability and the necessary support for workplace modifications be put in place to facilitate the short-term contracts that are often common in the sector.
- Government work with us to provide training to disability employment services to promote the arts and cultural sector as one which has the capacity to offer viable career paths and broad-ranging employment opportunities to people with disability.
- Government continue to support and fund the work of disability arts and advocacy organisations that are striving towards equal employment, participation and access.
- Arts and cultural funding be exempt from income testing.
- An internship program specifically designed for the arts and cultural sector be developed with a small number of arts organisations who can then become champions for employment of people with disability in the broader cultural sector.
- Resources be dedicated to general and disability-specific arts and cultural training, education and mentoring in order to give people with disability a pathway to employment in what is a very competitive labour market.
- Government work with AAA to facilitate the roll-out of disability awareness training to potential employers across the arts and cultural sector, with a view to improving access to knowledge and information by businesses and organisations.
- Reporting mechanisms be established for government agencies, disability employment services, disability services and disability peak bodies, and that quotas for employment of people with disability be put in place for these organisations.
- Government work with arts and cultural organisations to fund and support artistic tools and projects that allow people with disability to engage in planning to achieve their desired employment outcomes.
- Government engage with both arts organisations and NDIA planners during the roll-out of the NDIS, to ensure that the importance of cultural participation is recognised when considering appropriate and reasonable supports for people with disability.

- Government work with AAA and its extensive national network to support development of a database of arts activities, to enable people with disability, their families and support networks, to access arts activities, with the aim of strengthening local peer supports and providing a vehicle for social and economic contribution.

About Arts Access Australia

Arts Access Australia (AAA) is the peak national representative body for arts and disability. We work to increase opportunities and access for people with disability as artists, artsworkers, participants and audiences. AAA is a disability-led organisation that provides three key services for its members:

- Representation and advocacy;
- Facilitation and development; and
- Information and advice.

We deliver a number of key national projects with respect to the employment and professional development of artists with disability. We also deliver a number of other meetings, events, seminars, reference groups and activities. We are unique in that we work with people with disability in all areas of the arts, across all art forms, age groups, geographic locations and types of impairments.

Who We Work With

Our members include state peak arts and disability bodies, disability and mainstream arts organisations, disability services and individual artists and arts-workers with disability.

Background

AAA welcomes the opportunity to provide comment on the “New System for Better Employment and Social Outcomes” report. Our comments are informed by the experiences of Australians with disability who access the arts, their vision of how access to arts and culture through employment can be improved and the role that the arts can play in transforming employer attitudes. All staff currently employed at AAA identify as people with disability and as such, our comments are also informed by their extensive lived experience of disability and employment.

In 2012, AAA partnered with DADAA Inc to conduct national research into the current status, barriers and strategies for employment in the arts for people with disability. The data derived from that research is captured in a report entitled “Art Works – Arts Employment for People with Disability”, which can be found at: <http://www.artsaccessaustralia.org/resources/research-and-reports/454-art-works>. Hard copies are available on request.

As noted in that report, a lack of accessible employment and leadership opportunities is one of the most significant barriers remaining for people with disability to be able to engage fully and equally in Australian society. We believe, however, that the arts and cultural sector has the potential to lead the way in the area of inclusive employment practices for people with disability. For example, through media such as visual arts, theatre and performance, the arts and cultural sector has a unique capacity to provide visible and real representations of disability, that can have a broad-ranging social and public impact. We also note that

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employment was identified as one of the key priority areas of the National Arts and Disability Strategy (2009), and this has been supported through a number of national consultations run by AAA in recent years.

Simpler and Sustainable Income Support System

The “New System for better Employment and Social Outcomes” Interim report (hereafter referred to as the Report), recommends a simpler and sustainable income support system, with a tiered working age payment that is based on an assessment of capacity to work. There is no doubt that the major barrier to employment of people with disability in Australia relates to employer attitudes. These are not necessarily conscious and even when they are, they often come from fear and a lack of adequate public education and information. AAA has grave concerns that barriers of this nature would not be appropriately reflected in an assessment of capacity to work. Many people with disability possess appropriate qualifications and are both willing and able to work, but are prevented from doing so due to social and attitudinal constraints.

AAA believes that the arts has a significant role to play in changing employer attitudes and those of society in general, regarding the capacity of people with disability to work and make a meaningful contribution to Australian communities. The arts and cultural sector has a unique capacity to influence and create public perceptions of disability that are not contrived. For instance, we believe that if more actors with disability were seen on our stages and screens, this could lead to attitudinal change. Importantly, we would advocate for actors with disability to play not only those roles that are specifically scripted for them, but general roles such as doctors, lawyers, garbage collectors and so on, which could equally be played by a person without disability. Expectations of people with disability, their families and support networks can also create barriers to people with disability reaching their potential, and regular appearances by actors with disability have the capacity to raise those expectations. As such, in order to promote and improve the capacity of people with disability to work, we recommend that:

- Education and training of actors with disability and disability theatre companies be supported over the long-term;
- Government work with us to establish quotas for the numbers of actors with disability employed in Australia annually;
- Incentives be offered for the employment of artists with disability and the necessary support for workplace modifications be put in place to facilitate the short-term contracts that are often common in the sector;
- Government work with us to provide training to disability employment services to promote the arts and cultural sector as one which has the capacity to offer viable career paths and broad-ranging employment opportunities to people with disability; and
- Government continue to support and fund the work of disability arts and advocacy organisations that are striving towards equal employment, participation and access.

Rewards for Work and Targeting Assistance to Need

The Report recommends that income and asset test areas be reviewed, with a view to moving towards more consistent rules that provide appropriate rewards for work. It notes that consideration should also be given to how income from work could be more favorably treated than income from other sources. In view of the observations made in the Report, we believe that the arts and cultural sector possesses certain unique

characteristics which should be taken into account when considering appropriate rewards for work. In particular, work in the arts and cultural sector is often sporadic and unpredictable, which can make it impossible for artists and arts and cultural workers to access the workplace modifications scheme. The nature of arts funding is also unpredictable and is often paid in a lump sum, which can adversely impact on the artist's Centrelink payments. A grant is recognised by Centrelink as income, yet it is generally to be used to create work or undertake training, and not to cover living, medical and other impairment related expenses. This can be a significant disincentive for artists to apply for funding, which would otherwise allow them to create work, increase skills or improve their employment prospects. Therefore, when considering how to better integrate tax and transfer systems to improve incentives to work, we recommend that arts and cultural funding be exempt from income testing, in order to more accurately reflect the nature of employment in the sector.

Engaging with Employers

The Report notes that reforms are needed in order to ensure that the social support system effectively engages with employers and improves pathways to employment. Research conducted by AAA and DADAA Inc in 2012 indicated that there were several barriers to employment of people with disability in the arts and cultural sector, including:

- Limited job opportunities in the arts and cultural sector generally;
- Discrimination; and
- A failure by disability support services to promote careers in the arts for people with disability.

It is also clear that a lack of general and disability-specific training, education and mentoring opportunities inhibit the capacity of people with disability to find employment in the arts. It is well-known that the numbers of people with disability entering and completing formal education and training are considerably lower than for people without disability. Additionally, it is important to note that small and not for profit organisations make up a significant proportion of arts and cultural employers. For many, concerns regarding the cost of workplace modifications and lack of knowledge about available programs and incentives is a significant barrier to employing a person with disability. Australian Census data has indicated that creative services is one of the fastest growing areas of employment, with the rise of the digital economy, and it is crucial that people with disability are afforded opportunities to achieve equal and meaningful access to careers and opportunities within this sector. Therefore, in order to facilitate greater engagement with employers, we would recommend that:

- An internship program specifically designed for the arts and cultural sector be developed with a small number of arts organisations who can then become champions for employment of people with disability in the broader cultural sector.
- Resources be dedicated to general and disability-specific arts and cultural training, education and mentoring in order to give people with disability a pathway to employment in what is a very competitive labour market; and
- Government work with AAA to facilitate the roll-out of disability awareness training to potential employers across the arts and cultural sector, with a view to improving access to knowledge and information by businesses and organisations;
- Reporting mechanisms be established for government agencies, disability employment services, disability services and disability peak bodies, and that quotas for employment of people with disability be put in place for these organisations. This will not only improve employment participation for people

with disability; having more people with disability in the organisations set up to serve them has the potential to positively influence the culture of those organisations and improve client service.

Building Community capacity

As noted in the Report, communities have the capacity to improve employment and social outcomes for individuals, families and groups and it is necessary to look at ways in which corporates and philanthropic investors can drive innovative solutions and facilitate positive change. We believe that the arts and cultural sector has a vital role to play in building community capacity and participation. In particular, the arts can provide a strong platform, allowing job seekers with disability to achieve full economic, emotional and social participation. The arts is a leveler because it offers opportunities for people who may not usually interact to form relationships and share experiences. There are many examples of the ways in which activities such as choral singing, dance and drama can build stronger communities and personal relationships between otherwise disparate groups. Access to ongoing arts and cultural activities gives people with disability the opportunity to make social, economic and emotional contributions to their local communities. Through arts and cultural participation, people with disability are able to build strong peer support networks and influence the development and provision of high quality and responsive support that meets their individual needs, aspirations and goals. This level of participation is crucial because people with disability need to have real and meaningful input into any income support system that is designed to improve their community engagement and employment outcomes. We would recommend that:

- Government work with arts and cultural organisations to fund and support artistic tools and projects that allow people with disability to engage in planning to achieve their desired employment outcomes;
- Government engage with both arts organisations and NDIA planners during the roll-out of the NDIS, to ensure that the importance of cultural participation is recognised when considering appropriate and reasonable supports for people with disability;
- Government work with AAA and its extensive national network to support development of a database of arts activities, to enable people with disability, their families and support networks, to access arts activities, with the aim of strengthening local peer supports and providing a vehicle for social and economic contribution.

Conclusion

The arts and cultural sector offers a wealth of opportunities for employment participation by people with disability as artists, arts-workers, arts managers, administrators and the many associated non arts-specific roles required to run arts organisations. Unfortunately, these opportunities are often missed because, as indicated by national research, disability employment services do not generally view the arts and cultural sector as having the capacity to provide viable career pathways. Better employment outcomes and a decreased reliance on income support for people with disability will only come about if there is a shift in attitudes and expectations of employers, people with disability, their families and support networks. Employment of people with disability in the arts will make a tangible impact on changing both conscious and unconscious attitudes and on raising expectations. This strategy needs to be given priority because it effectively increases levels of employment whilst harnessing the potential to influence employer attitudes at a national level.

We thank the reference group for the opportunity to comment on the Report. Please feel free to contact AAA CEO Emma Bennison should you wish to discuss any aspect of this submission further.

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