



Australian Government
Department of Social Services

DES Quality Framework

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1. Introduction

1.1. Disability Employment Services

The Disability Employment Services (DES) Program facilitates employment for people with disability in Australia – helping them find, secure and keep a job. The DES Program complements other employment supports such as those available through the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS).

DES providers are a mix of large, medium and small for-profit and not-for-profit organisations experienced in supporting people with disability, as well as assisting employers to support employees with disability in the workplace.

There are three Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) in place that underpin the performance framework for the DES Program:

- KPI 1: Efficiency
- KPI 2: Effectiveness
- KPI 3: Quality.

The three KPIs together drive performance, integrity and quality supported by targeted assurance and compliance.

The Department of Social Services (DSS) will monitor, measure and evaluate KPI 3: Quality in accordance with Clause 155 of the Grant Agreement. This DES Quality Framework (Framework) strengthens KPI 3: Quality by placing the participant at the centre.

DSS expects providers to use the Framework and DES Quality Framework Guidelines (Guidelines) to examine and improve their service delivery and feedback processes to ensure the delivery of quality outcomes for participants.

1.2. Quality in a DES context

Quality in a DES context is about the outcomes achieved for participants in the program and how this support is delivered. This is primarily about helping participants achieve *employment outcomes*, but also includes broader *social and economic outcomes*. There are four participant outcomes which the DES program seeks to achieve. These are that:

1. Participants are able to secure and maintain sustainable employment in the open labour market, consistent with their goals, preferences and skills.
2. Participants improve their employability, supported by DES providers who understand their needs and provide help that builds on their strengths and capabilities and addresses their barriers.
3. Participants obtain and sustain long-term employment through DES providers that understand employers' needs and help them to support employees with disability in the workplace.
4. Participants achieve greater social inclusion.

Delivering high quality services will ensure DES providers achieve these positive participant outcomes.

This Framework focusses on the elements that DES providers will be required to demonstrate to achieve quality outcomes for participants. Departmental research to examine the delivery of quality services in the DES Program identified a number of provider practices which contributed to high quality service delivery and outcomes:

- Person-centred service delivery – using approaches such as structured support models, customised job placements, supported work experience placement and holistic support on the journey to employment.
- Employer engagement and job placements – understanding employer support needs and how they can be met through tools like tailored job design and ongoing support. Employer engagement and education is essential to successful outcomes.
- Community connections – establishing a network of community partners and being part of the community.
- Innovation and research – focusing on continuous improvement, evidence-based approaches to all activities, identifying emerging markets and areas of skills shortage are examples of good practice in this space.
- Service culture and staffing – taking a strengths-based approach to supporting participants, embedding values (such as kindness, care and honesty) into standards and practices, recruiting the right team and embedding measures to support staff retention and satisfaction creates an environment where participants and staff can thrive.

1.3. DES Quality Framework

This Framework has been developed to improve the quality of DES services and lift up the whole system to provide better outcomes for people living with disability.

The Framework implemented from July 2023 is formalised in Guidelines with formal assessments against the Framework commencing from January 2024.

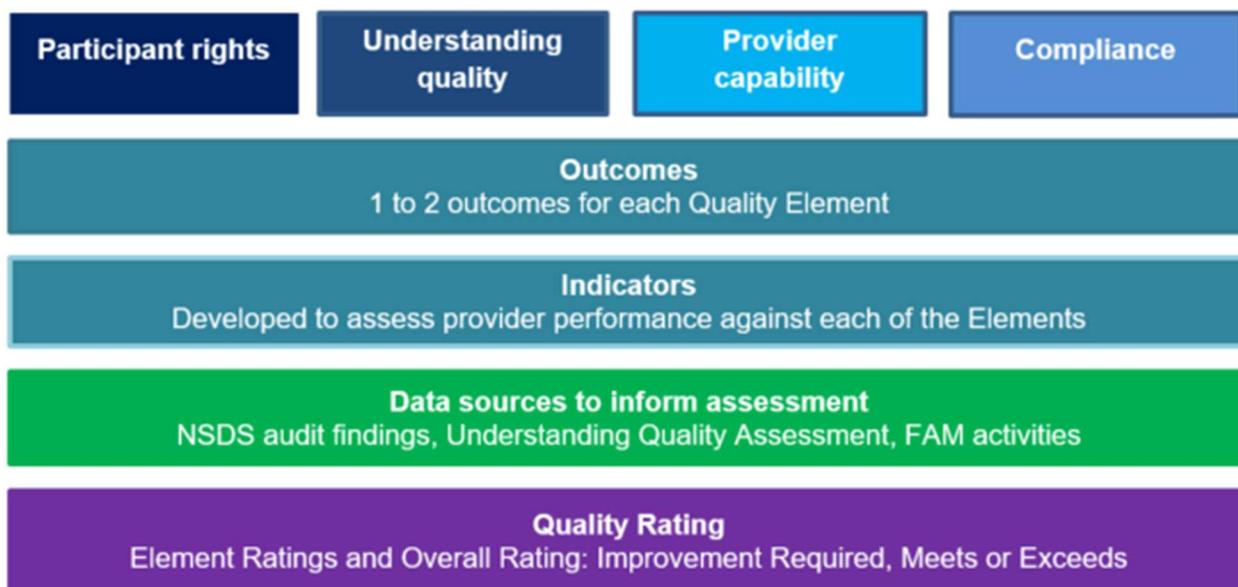
DES providers will participate in a quality assessment process against the Framework. The aim of this Framework is to:

- Drive meaningful and sustained quality improvement across the DES program
- Ensure that the participant voice and experiences are at the centre of driving a quality approach
- Provide a mechanism for refocusing current quality improvement activities
- Embed a culture of continuous improvement and quality innovation practices for delivery.

Components of the Framework

The Framework includes four quality elements. Each quality element is supported by one or two outcome statements a set of indicators and a series of measurements. The figure below illustrates the key components of the Framework.

Figure 1: Components of the Framework



1.4. Relationship with the National Standards for Disability Services and Grant Agreements

The DES Program sets service requirements that DES providers need to meet including, the certification against the National Standards for Disability Services (NSDS).

The Framework aligns with the NSDS and other relevant standards. It also provides a level of flexibility to ensure DES providers are given the opportunity to continually improve and innovate over time, and to go beyond minimum standards, to meet the needs of participants. In recognising this, audit results against the NSDS will be a primary source of data for determining a rating against each element. The purpose of the Framework is to build on these standards with quality principles that focus on:

- Understanding how quality service is delivered by DES providers on the ground
- Ensuring participant centred delivery with strong feedback loops to encourage innovation and drive continuous quality performance improvement
- Ensuring that DES providers are fulfilling their obligations under the DES Grant Agreement and meeting the standards required.

1.5. Guiding principles

The purpose of the Framework is to drive meaningful and sustained quality improvement. Research and consultation has identified that to achieve this a tailored and systems based approach is needed. The following principles underpin the Framework:

- **Participant centred:** the Framework ensures participants are at the centre of service design, planning, delivery and review.
- **Inclusive and responsive:** the Framework will promote supports that are inclusive and responsive.
- **Equitable and accessible:** the Framework supports service provision that is timely and accessible and is provided in a setting where supports are appropriate for meeting the needs and goals of people with disability.
- **Outcomes focused:** the Framework will focus on outcomes for people who use services and supports.
- **Regulatory burden is minimised:** the Framework aims to remove unnecessary burden for individuals and organisations, while still achieving its quality aims.
- **Continuous improvement:** the Framework drives continuous improvement through promoting pathways to provide robust and timely feedback, including compliments and complaints.

2. Measuring and assessing quality

2.1 Four quality elements

The Framework comprises of four quality elements which support the achievement of participant employment outcomes and drive meaningful and sustainable quality improvement.

The quality elements with their outcome statements are:

Element	Outcomes
Participant Rights	Participants understand their rights and responsibilities as DES participants, and the role of DES providers in helping them access supports available to enable them to improve their employability and achieve positive employment outcomes.
Understanding Quality	DES providers understand participants' needs and support participants to build capacity and achieve their employment goals and aspirations. DES providers understand the local labour market and the needs and expectations of employers, and work with employers and community services to effectively support participants.

Element	Outcomes
Provider Capability	DES providers have a continuous improvement culture with appropriate policies, systems and processes, together with staff and management capabilities to deliver quality services and manage risk.
Compliance	DES providers utilise existing compliance and assurance processes and associated outcomes to proactively support quality service delivery and continuous quality improvement.

Each quality element will be supported by:

- one or two outcome statements
- articulation of what good looks like for DES providers to meet these outcomes, and
- an appropriate number of indicators and measures.

Appendix A outlines the elements of good practice for each quality element. DSS liaised with DES providers and participants, and their representative organisations to develop these outcome statements and indicators.

2.2. Roles and responsibilities

The Framework requires involvement of a range of stakeholders including DES participants, DES providers and frontline staff, employers and the community sector, and government. Examples of the types of roles and responsibilities for each stakeholder group is illustrated in the following table.

Stakeholder	Roles and responsibilities
DES participants	<p>People with disability have an important role in ensuring that the quality of supports they receive are appropriate to their needs and meet their goals and aspirations, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • participating in assessment activities as required • providing feedback.
Frontline staff	Frontline staff will play an important operational and support delivery role to ensure Framework requirements are met.
Employers and Community Sector	<p>Employers and the community service sector have an important role in ensuring that the quality of support they receive builds participant capacity and facilitates employment opportunities that are appropriate to the needs of people with disability, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing capacity building and employment opportunities • participating in networking and collaboration events

Stakeholder	Roles and responsibilities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> providing feedback.
DES providers	DES providers will have responsibility for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> responding to Framework assessment requirements establishing mechanisms for the participation of their organisation in quality system processes developing systems, structures and mechanisms within their organisation for reporting back on achievement against the Framework sharing and interacting with other providers to support continuous quality improvement and capacity building.
Government	DSS will have overarching leadership and a facilitation role in relation to the Framework.

2.3. Quality Ratings

Quality ratings will be determined at a provider organisational level. Quality ratings will be awarded on a three point scale detailed in the following table.

Rating	Details
Exceeds ✓✓✓	Providers are exceeding the department’s quality expectations.
Meets ✓✓	Providers are meeting the department’s quality expectations.
Improvement Required ✓	Providers have not fully met the department’s quality expectations. Improvement actions are required or will continue.

Quality ratings will be released every six months capturing performance over a rolling 12- month period.

Quality ratings will be awarded for each quality element which will be combined to determine the overall rating for each provider.

2.4. Data and evidence

Quality Ratings will be based on a review of:

1. NSDS audit findings
2. Understanding Quality Self-Assessment Tool, and
3. Departmental program management and compliance information.

This allows for a combination of qualitative and quantitative evidence to determine provider quality ratings. The assessment will focus on how a DES provider demonstrates a

systematic approach to each element. This will include how knowledge, understanding and awareness of each element is applied in practice and the monitoring and evaluation mechanisms in place to support continuous improvement to achieve quality elements. This could include:

- participant perspectives across all elements of the Framework including meaningful engagement with participants
- employer and community service perspectives regarding the quality of their services and engagement with DES providers
- the DES provider’s approach to continuous quality improvement and the methods used to measure the effectiveness of systems and processes
- outcomes from audit and compliance assessments, for example NSDS certification processes, ISO certification, NDIS Practice Standard certification and Quality Assurance Framework for Workforce Australia certification.
- departmental Funding Agreement Manager site visits and engagement with DES providers,
- complaints and feedback data from the Complaints Resolution and Referral Service and the National Customer Service Line.

Evidence will be triangulated to provide a holistic assessment of performance against the Framework.

NSDS

The quality elements in the Framework align to each NSDS standard providing a level of flexibility and ensuring providers have the opportunity to continually improve and innovate over time, and to go beyond minimum standards to meet the needs of participants.

Audit results against the NSDS will be a primary source of data for determining a rating against each element and supported by existing departmental data sources.

Quality Elements Mapped to NSDS Standards

Quality Element	NSDS Standard
Element 1: Participant Rights	Standard 1: Rights
Element 2: Understanding Quality	Standard 2: Participation and Inclusion Standard 3: Individual Outcomes Standard 5: Service Access
Element 3: Provider Capability	Standard 6: Service management
Element 4: Compliance	Standard 4: Feedback and Complaints

Understanding Quality Self-Assessment Tool

A Provider Understanding Quality Self-Assessment Tool will inform the rating for Element 2: Understanding Quality. This will allow for a consistent self-assessment by providers to describe a continuum of quality for two outcome statements defined for this element.

This enables providers to:

- examine and reflect on the quality of their services
- share information about the quality of service delivery to inform the quality rating

2.5. Capturing participant, employer and community services perspectives

Participant, employer and community perspectives are at the core of driving quality services.

It is important that the perspectives of participants and employers are captured in ways that facilitate their contribution. For participants, it is important that any engagement be conducted within the context of their obligations as a job seeker, considers the range of needs and communication preferences that participants may have, and allows participants to provide their views in a variety of ways. Any engagement with employers and community services needs to recognise their level of interest and engagement with DES, and similarly allows them to provide their views in a variety of ways.

In the first instance it is proposed that DSS will seek participant, employer and community service perspectives through the self-assessment process, utilising existing information and data gathered through DES providers' own engagement processes. Further work will be undertaken to examine supplementing this approach with independent surveys or other engagement methods.

2.6. Ongoing development of the Framework

DSS will continue to take a continuous improvement approach to the Framework including:

- Finalising a participant information pack which is being tested with participants
- Options to strengthen the participant and employer voice
- Enhancements to the NSDS and departmental processes
- How to better capture data.

Appendix A: Quality elements, outcomes and elements of good practice

Element 1: Participant rights

Elements of good practice

Outcome 1.1: Participants understand their rights and responsibilities as DES participants, and the role of DES providers in helping them access DES supports available to enable them to improve their employability and achieve positive employment outcomes

Elements of good practice include:

- The DES provider facilitates access to appropriate and accessible information for participants to help them understand their rights and how to exercise those rights, including their rights to self-determination, choice and decision-making, freedom of expression and freedom from discrimination.
- The DES provider supports participants to understand the benefits of employment make appropriate decisions and choices about their employment and employment supports, within the bounds of the DES program and broader employment environment.
- The DES provider ensures staff, management and leadership have information and training on understanding and upholding participant rights.
- The DES provider has policies and procedures in place relating to participant rights and DES provider responsibilities, and ensure that staff fully understand and implement and follow these policies and procedures.
- The DES provider delivers on-boarding processes that are participant focused and flexible in response to the individual needs and circumstances.
- The DES provider seeks feedback from participants on its processes and their effectiveness. DES providers actively use this to improve and innovate the services they deliver.

Element 2: Understanding quality

Elements of good practice

Outcome 2.1: DES providers understand participants' needs and support participants to build capacity and achieve their employment goals and aspirations

Elements of good practice include:

- The DES provider supports participants to express their employment goals and aspirations and actively participate in service planning.
- The DES provider understands and assesses participants' needs and circumstances and their capacity and barriers to achieving their employment goals and aspirations.
- The DES provider delivers tailored supports that provide participants with suitable pathways to employment and assists them to meet their obligations and requirements and is adaptable to changes in the participant's circumstances.
- The DES provider supports participants in a timely manner to build long term capability including access to interventions that address barriers, build capability, improve job readiness and supports sustained employment.
- The DES provider seeks feedback from participants on its processes and their effectiveness. DES providers actively use this to improve and innovate the services they deliver.

Outcome 2.2: DES providers understand the local labour market and the needs and expectations of employers, and work with employers and community services to effectively support participants

Elements of good practice include:

- The DES provider delivers tailored end-to-end recruitment support to employers, including effective post placement services to participants and employers to support transition into employment and ongoing employment opportunities.
- The DES provider actively connects, networks and collaborates with community, employers, industry and other relevant stakeholders to understand labour market needs and deliver diverse and supported pathways for participants.
- The DES provider seeks feedback from employers and community services on its processes and their effectiveness. DES providers actively use this to improve and innovate the services they deliver.

Element 3: Provider capability

Elements of good practice

Outcome 3.1: DES providers have a continuous improvement culture with appropriate policies, systems and processes, together with staff and management capabilities to deliver quality services and manage risk

Elements of good practice include:

- The DES provider's staff, management and governing bodies have the required skills and capabilities to deliver quality services, including understanding of contemporary approaches to supporting people with disability.
- The DES provider facilitates access to ongoing formal and informal learning and development for its staff, management and governing bodies.
- The DES provider has processes and practices which ensure participants, employers and community services are actively involved in developing and/or improving process to continuously improve service provision.
- The DES providers' management systems are clearly defined, documented and monitored and (where appropriate) communicated, to ensure participant-centred services can be delivered.
- The DES provider has robust risk processes in place to identify, assess and manage risk, and processes to escalate and report risks to DSS when required – encompassing risks to participants, financial and work health and safety risks, and risks associated with provision of supports.

Element 4: Compliance

Elements of good practice

Outcome 4.1: DES providers utilise existing compliance and assurance processes and associated outcomes to proactively support quality service delivery and continuous quality improvement

Elements of good practice include:

- The DES provider actively uses data and insights from existing compliance and assurance processes to improve the quality of services provided to participants.
- The DES provider, in conjunction with participants, seeks and reviews feedback on service provision on a regular basis, as part of continuous improvement.
- The DES provider develops a culture of continuous improvement using compliments, feedback and complaints to plan, deliver and review services for participants.
- The DES provider has mechanisms to manage disputes and proactively monitor and respond to complaints and breaches.
- The DES provider supports participants to actively provide feedback, make a complaint or resolve a dispute without fear of adverse consequences.