The recent background on the issue of disability employment includes the 2004 ‘welfare-to-work’ budget of the then Treasurer Peter Costello and in 2011 has culminated in Prime Minister Julia Gillard’s ‘dignity of work’ keynote speech on Australia Day.

The setting for the present strong government imperative in this area coincides with skill shortages in a number of industrial sectors and geographic locations, combined with a low unemployment rate, significant global pressures to boost productivity and be competitive, and a continued growth in the number of Australians who are drawing disability support pensions, now numbering in the order of 800,000 people. Many of those Australians on welfare are capable of and would prefer to take advantage of the dignity of work. They want to contribute to their own and the nation’s prosperity, but continue to enjoy little success in their attempts to find suitable work in the job market.

The Government has nailed its colours to the mast with a significant investment last year in a $1.7 billion Disability Employment Services uncapped facility and has allocated $8.5 billion over four years in the 2011-12 Budget to the Building Australia’s Future Workforce initiative which is designed to improve employment services in general and boost participation, including the participation of those on a disability support pension.

There is widespread support from the major employer groups and the trade unions for those initiatives and AHRI shares that enthusiasm.

That said, we have long thought that, as important as it undoubtedly is to boost the supply side of the equation by maximising the job-readiness of job seekers, it is equally critical to give attention to the demand side, there being little point in having a job-ready army of job seekers if employers are not engaged in the process and are therefore not disposed to hire.

Mindful of those considerations, AHRI decided to survey its database to get a snapshot of employer attitudes. In looking at the findings I would ask you to be mindful that the views expressed are those of anonymous individual HR practitioners who are working at the intersection between employers and employees, including recruits. That is, they are free to speak their minds and I trust they have done so.

I commend the findings to you and hope that they assist in furthering this very worthwhile cause in the nation’s interest.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Suzanne Colbert from the Australian Network on Disability for her support as a fellow employer colleague on the Minister’s Disability Employment Services Reference Group.

Serge Sardo
Chief Executive Officer
Australian Human Resources Institute
This survey was initiated by the Australian Human Resources Institute (AHRI) with the general intention of providing a snapshot of quantitative and qualitative data from the ground on how the Federal Government’s Disability Employment Services are travelling, with particular reference to informing the deliberations of the Minister’s Disability Employment Services Reference Group, of which the AHRI chief executive Serge Sardo is a member.

Acknowledgements
Project director: Serge Sardo
Research coordinator: Anne-Marie Dolan
Report authors: Serge Sardo, Paul Begley
Design and layout: Stephanie Regan

© Copyright Australian Human Resources Institute August 2011
CONTENTS

FOREWORD

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY  2

THE SURVEY  4

DEMOGRAPHICS  4

DETAILED FINDINGS  7

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS  22
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

• With a response rate of 678 completed questionnaires from the AHRI database of around 20,000, and seven out of 10 respondents (68.73%) reporting having recruited a candidate with a disability, it is likely that the sample is somewhat distorted in favour of respondents with a prior interest.

• The invitation to take the quite short survey was repeated three times over three weeks and strongly urged those whose organisations had not recruited a person with a disability to participate, but that invitation had limited success with only 31.27% of respondents making up that sample group.

• The demographic data show that almost three quarters of the respondents were female (73.09%) And that roughly equal numbers were from the private and public sectors (40% each).

ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE EMPLOYED A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY

• More than one in 10 (13.97%) of those who appointed a candidate with a disability reported recruiting through a graduate recruitment program, and two out of three (65.27%) reported not having used the Disability Employment Service (DES) to fill the vacancy.

• One in three (33.33%) reported being prompted by the organisation’s strong social responsibility and diversity culture, a quarter (23.81%) were approached by a DES provider, and exactly one in 10 (10%) responded to a suggestion from an internal HR department. Only 3.81% made the appointment to reach a diversity target.

• Only one in three found the DES providers easy to locate and navigate, and reported favourably on responsiveness with respect to the timeliness of the appointment and the appropriateness of qualifications and experience of candidates.

• More than half of that sample group (58.1%) reported being fully informed about the supports available in the event of a successful employment, though 15.4% reported being given no supportive information and 10.5% reported the candidate did not match the job description as advertised.

• Nearly one in five respondents (18.79%) from that sample group reported that DES providers were either far less or marginally less responsive than mainstream recruitment services. By contrast, nearly half of that group (41.82%) reported DES providers were either far more or marginally more responsive than mainstream recruitment services.

• Nearly nine out of 10 (87.53%) reported that a candidate with a disability was short-listed, with a similar proportion actually employing a person with a disability to the vacancy.

• In terms of type of impairment for the noticeable disability of an appointed candidate, 31.19% reported mobility impairment, 17.82% an intellectual disability, 16.83% a hearing impairment, 11.63% a sight impairment and 10.09% a mental illness.

• More than half (54.38%) reported the appointment as very successful, 28.35% as moderately successful, with less than one in 10 reporting very unsuccessful (1.8%) or not very successful (6.19%). Approximately one in 10 (9.28%) were not sure.

• Around half of that sample group (54.33%) would expect a person with a hidden disability to declare it in the recruitment process. Of the sample group of respondents whose organisations had not employed a person with a disability, the expectation was about the same (48.54%).
ORGANISATIONS THAT HAVE NOT EMPLOYED A PERSON WITH A DISABILITY

- Of the sample group that had not employed a person with a disability, more than half (54.04%) reported not knowing about DES, and a little less than half (46.46%) said the issue was not on their radar. More than a third (38.89%) reported not knowing about the benefits available to employers using DES, and 35.35% reported not knowing how to access the services. Nearly a quarter (23.74%) reported not being confident that a suitable applicant would be provided by a DES provider.

- A third of those respondents (33.84%) believed there would not be support from the CEO and executive group (11.11%), line managers (12.12%) or the general employee culture (10.61%) for the appointment of a person with a noticeable disability.

- Nearly a quarter (22.97%), believe there is a perception in their organisation that a person with a disability would not perform as well as a person without a disability. Around a third (35.89%) were not sure on that question.

- More than one in five of 205 respondents (22.49%), believe there is perception in their organisation that a person with a disability would be high risk and potentially expensive.

- Around half (49.74%) were either unsure or believed those perceptions would have some negative influence or be a main barrier in preventing the employment of a person with a disability in the organisation.
THE SURVEY

The questions that comprise this survey were circulated online to the database of the Australian Human Resources Institute over three weeks during late-July and early-August 2011.

A total of 678 respondents completed the survey which sought views from two groups:

- Those that had employed a person with a noticeable disability
- Those that had not employed a person with a noticeable disability.

DEMOGRAPHICS

As indicated in Figure 1, around three quarters (73.09%) of respondents are female and 26.91% male.

Figure 1. Gender
Figure 2 shows that directors (10.52%), senior managers (21.98%), managers (29.98%) and supervisors (4.71%) represent nearly 70% of the respondents to the survey, with advisers (11.62%) and consultants (7.85%) accounting for around 20% of respondents.

**Figure 2. Roles**

![Figure 2. Roles](image)

Figure 3 indicates that approximately 40% of respondents are from private sector, 40% from the public sector, and around 20% from not-for-profit organisations.

**Figure 3. Organisation type**

![Figure 3. Organisation type](image)
Nearly half the respondents (48.48%) are from organisations that employ between 100 and 1000 workers, as indicated in Figure 4. A little more than a quarter (28.75%) are from organisations with more than 1000 employees and a quarter (25.26%) are from smaller organisations employing fewer than 100 workers.

In summary, three quarters of respondents are from large organisations.

Figure 4. Size of organisation
DETAILED FINDINGS

Figure 5 reveals that nearly seven out of 10 respondents (68.73%) are from organisations that have employed a person with a disability.

The extent to which that proportion is typical, is problematic. With fewer than 700 respondents from an AHRI database in the order of 20,000, the response is around half the usual AHRI response rate and it is reasonable to read into that a distortion on the basis of a level of prior respondent interest in the issue.

In addition, the relatively low number of respondents who answered ‘No’ (31.27%) may indicate that potential respondents whose organisations had never employed a person did not consider the survey to be of relevance for that reason and so did not answer the questionnaire, and that is despite the invitation explicitly requesting responses from people whose organisations had never employed a person with a disability.

Figure 5. Has your organisation recruited a candidate with a disability?

![Bar chart showing 68.73% 'Yes' and 31.27% 'No' with (678 responses) note]

Of those who answered ‘Yes’, Figure 6 shows that more than one in 10 (13.97%) recruited a person with a disability as part of a graduate recruitment program.

That figure represents 63 organisations out of 451 that recruited a person with a university degree under the scheme, and puts to rest the stereotype notion that a person with a disability somehow suffers from inherent shortcomings in intelligence or general capability.
Figure 6. Has your organisation recruited a candidate with a disability through a graduate recruitment program?

![Figure 6](image)

Figure 7 indicates that of those respondents who answered ‘Yes’, around a third (34.73%) used the Disability Employment Services (DES) provided by the government to fill the vacancy.

That leaves two out of three respondent organisations (65.27%) that have employed a person with a disability but have not availed themselves of the considerable benefits available through DES to do so.

While the survey goes on to enable partial answers to why that might be so, it leaves open the extent to which those organisations knew about the existence of DES or not. Or if they had knowledge of DES, did they refrain from using the services through difficulty in accessing them or through a predisposed lack of confidence in the likelihood of their efficacy? The survey results provide some answers to the latter questions.

This finding suggests that many organisations that decide to recruit someone with a disability will do so independently without the available support. This is positive in one sense but it also suggests a low lack of awareness or confidence in DES.

Figure 7. Have you ever used DES to fill a vacancy?

![Figure 7](image)
Figure 8 shows that of the 210 respondents who answered the question on what prompted the decision to use DES, one in three (33.33%) was prompted by the organisation’s strong social responsibility and diversity culture, a quarter (23.81%) were approached by a DES provider, and one in 10 (10%) responded to a suggestion from an internal HR department. Only 3.81% used DES to reach a diversity target.

Corporate culture appears to be the primary driver for accessing DES, supporting the notion of placing greater resources and funding into raising the priorities of diversity values within organisations. Nearly a quarter of respondents reported using the services due to a direct approach from DES providers, supporting the need for DES providers to market and promote themselves, i.e. it amounts to a more sales driven approach to generating job placements.

The qualitative data in the survey results also support the finding that organisations are responsive to being approached appropriately by a DES provider, appropriateness having to do with timeliness and a realistic business engagement with the organisation’s recruitment need rather than a disproportionate emphasis on needs of the job seeker.

Figure 8. What prompted the organisation to use DES?
Table 1 looks at the responses of 172 respondents who have used DES. Of those respondents, around one in three found the DES providers easy to locate and their processes easy to navigate. About the same proportion found that they were responsive with respect to the timeliness of the appointment and the appropriateness of qualifications and experience of candidates.

Considerably more than half (58.1%) reported being fully informed about the supports available in the event of a successful employment, though 15.4% reported being uninformed.

**Table 1. Describe your experience using DES**

(172 responses)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Per cent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The DES provider was easy to locate</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DES provider’s processes were easy to navigate</td>
<td>30.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DES provider was responsive to my organisation’s need to fill the vacancy quickly</td>
<td>36.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DES provider was responsive to my organisation’s need to fill the vacancy with an appropriately qualified person</td>
<td>34.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DES provider was responsive to my organisation’s need to fill the vacancy with an appropriately experienced person</td>
<td>37.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We were fully informed of the supports available to us if we employed an applicant with a disability</td>
<td>58.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We were not informed of the supports available to us if we employed an applicant with a disability</td>
<td>15.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DES provider did not respond quickly enough to suit my organisation’s timeframe</td>
<td>5.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DES provider responded with candidates that did not match the job description as advertised</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was no response from the DES provider</td>
<td>3.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The DES provider’s processes were difficult to navigate</td>
<td>4.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 9 indicates that of 165 respondents who were in a position to compare DES providers and mainstream recruitment providers, nearly one in five respondents (18.79%) reported that DES providers were either far less or marginally less responsive than mainstream recruitment services. By contrast, a much larger minority (41.82%) reported DES providers were either far more or marginally more responsive than mainstream recruitment services, with about the same proportion (39.39%) reporting that the service provision was about the same.

**Figure 9. How would you compare DES to mainstream recruitment providers?**

![Chart showing responses]

**SAMPLE RESPONDENT COMMENTS**

A total of 87 respondents added commentary to the question in Figure 9. A sample of comments is set out below:

“DES was appreciative of the opportunity to place one of its candidates and acted very quickly”

“Mainstream recruitment services represent the needs of the organisation whereas DES providers naturally represent the individual (their clients). For example, for jobs I have advertised I have been cold called by DES services promising suitable candidates and incentives/supports, but every time the candidates do not meet even the most essential criteria. DES services are often focused on client placement irrespective of what the organisation wants”

“DES is more about focusing on the inability and disability thereby making the process more about charity than focussing on ability and self-help”

“The DES provided excellent service and kept us informed at all times”

“I had some issue in having the DES coordinate our employee’s paperwork to ensure we receive the appropriate government funding. I ended up chasing relevant stakeholders for signatures and information and the whole process took months, when I would have thought it should have taken only weeks”

“No use DES - find recruiters with disability recruitment programs far more effective”

“Whilst we had identified the skills and level of the jobs and the managers involved were keen to
employ a suitably qualified person with a disability, the candidates they provided whilst having good qualifications, did not in any way match the needs of the job. This set the candidates up for failure and disappointed the managers”

“The disability support provider was less slick, but provided more and ongoing follow-up”

“Although we received funding it took me quite a long time to find a DES who could help with workplace modifications that could help this employee”

“The DES provider is able to spend as much time as we need to make the vacancy and fit the candidate perfectly”

“Even though the role was briefed thoroughly with the DES provider the candidates did not have the experience or fit the culture we were looking for”

“The DES provider was more responsive but with only one candidate offered for the identified position, we were then approached on numerous occasions with other candidates seeking placement for jobs we did not have”

“DES was not used in the employment of our candidate with a disability. The candidate applied for the position directly and was successful”

“We have not used DES - any recruitment of people with a disability is more or less ‘accidental’. We have not targeted recruitment of people with a disability”

“We used another organisation called SignOn who seek to place people with a disability or people struggling to find employment. They contacted us directly promoting their services when they saw us advertising for admin staff”

“Our organisation is not in a position to create roles for specifically for candidates with a disability. However if the candidate has the relevant skills and experience required for the role, they will be assessed as any other candidate”

“My experience of hiring through a DES was hiring intellectually disabled staff through Job Support. Job Support was fantastic in matching the right candidates to the roles and providing ongoing support”

“DES didn’t seem as efficient with communication regarding placement and ongoing support”

“The DES was not used, The candidate applied for the job and was successful”

“We have not heard of DES or what they do”

“We don’t actively recruit through DES, however are willing to review applicants based on our requirements if they have a suitable candidate. DES is reluctant to advise the type of disability the person has (especially if there is a mental impairment). This diminishes our ability to identify a suitable role”
Figure 10 shows that the great majority of 369 respondents who answered this question reported that their organisation short-listed an applicant with a disability (87.53%).

**Figure 10. Did a candidate with a disability get short-listed?**

![Bar chart showing 87.53% of respondents said yes, and 12.47% said no.](image)

Figure 11 shows that while fewer respondents (345) answered the question as to whether the applicant referred to in Figure 10 was successful in getting the job, the percentage was slightly higher in that 92.17% reported that organisation had employed the person with a disability. On that disparity, it can be safely assumed that a small proportion of respondents who had answered the question relating to short-listing did not answer the question relating to whether the short-listed applicant had been successful, thus inflating the latter number to a small extent.

It should be kept in mind when considering the respondent numbers in Figures 10 and 11 that 466 respondents indicated their organisation had recruited a candidate with a disability (see Figure 5) and that only 157 organisations used DES to fill the vacancy (see Figure 7).

**Figure 11. Did your organisation employ a person with a disability to the vacant position?**

![Bar chart showing 92.17% of respondents said yes, and 7.83% said no.](image)
More respondents answered a question on the successful candidate’s type of disability, as indicated in Figure 12. Of 404 respondents, 31.19% reported the appointed candidate’s noticeable disability as a mobility impairment, 17.82% an intellectual disability, 16.83% a hearing impairment, 11.63% a sight impairment and 10.09% a mental illness.

**Figure 12. How would you best describe the noticeable disability of the successful candidate?**

![Figure 12](image1.png)

Figure 12 indicates the extent to which 388 respondents regarded the success or otherwise of the appointment of the candidate. More than half (54.38%) reported the appointment as very successful, 28.35% as moderately successful, with less than one in 10 reporting very unsuccessful (1.8%) or not very successful (6.19%). Around one in 10 respondents (9.28%) were unsure.

This is a good news story suggesting that if a candidate is successful in obtaining a job then that placement is likely to be ongoing and positive. While the bulk of the respondent comments confirm that view, those that are not successful would appear to negatively affect employer attitudes, especially if the service provider has not been upfront or has not followed through.

**Figure 13. How successful was the appointment?**

![Figure 13](image2.png)
SAMPLE RESPONDENT COMMENTS

A total of 155 respondents offered comments on the extent to which the appointment of a person with a disability had been successful. A sample is set out below:

“This person has been continuously employed with us for 16 years”

“The nature of the impairment meant a higher degree of supervision and direction was required”

“Tasks that could be performed were limited and therefore usefulness of the individual was limited. However, the experience was very positive. We re-engaged the individual on a casual basis after the six month initial contract which was government funded”

“She is by far the most professional and polite person we have in our Customer Care Team. A wonderful woman”

“The person requires much more supervision than anticipated”

“Both the candidate and the organisation are very happy with the outcome. He has a mild intellectual impairment and is employed in a role with lesser complexity but precise skills which he has acquired”

“Employee was extremely difficult to manage and did not want to disclose liability fully to leaders. Made it extremely difficult to meet duty of care to employee. Was not fully disclosed by recruiter”

“Candidate has undertaken the job extremely well”

“We had to let the person go as we were concerned about their health and safety (i.e. they didn’t understand risks properly)”

“Placement organisation that was supposed to provide ongoing support disclosed the mobility impairment but not the intellectual disability - we adapted the role to accommodate the mobility impairment but gradually became aware of the intellectual disability with virtually no ownership or support provided by the placement organisation despite owning up that they had prior knowledge while the employee’s performance continued to slide”

“Because the person was up front we were able to ensure she had the right tools to succeed”

“Very reliable, conscientious employee”

“Some appointments have been more successful than others”

“We have hired people with physical and intellectual disabilities. The noticeable disabilities are obvious. However if someone transfers internally, what can the manager do when it comes to intellectual or mental disabilities? Should they ask? Can they ask?”

“Cannot undertake certain functions of the role”

“I did not set out to recruit a person with a disability, but decided to give him a chance based on his skills and enthusiasm. There were some challenges initially with staff and clients getting used to dealing with his disability but everyone cooperated to ease his transition and find ways to deal with inherent problems. It’s a win-win situation. He is thrilled to have the opportunity. He works well, and sees this as a long-term career path which has solved our problem of staff turnover in this area in the past”

“She has a full prosthetic limb and limps noticeably. She has coped 110%”

“The candidate was very grateful to be given an opportunity to work and has been a dedicated employee for over 20 years”

“The opportunity was only for a short period contract. I was hoped that further opportunities would arise where we could get the candidate back but it was a struggle convincing managers as they were not confident with the limited communication as the person was deaf and did not vocalise. Phone communication was not possible for which significantly limited the scope of work possible. Fine for the original working of packaging items for a big mail out”
“We have just under 10 employees with an identified disability. All were hired through standard recruitment processes. We have not used DES or similar services because of resistance from line managers”

“It has taken some significant internal marketing to gain acceptance for the reasonable adjustments required”

“This employee has been working with us for over 8 years. He is loyal, committed and does a great job”

“Multiple people with disabilities have been employed recently in my organisation. We have better performance and work outcomes from people with a visual impairment, and greater difficulties with people who have a profound hearing impairment and employees with severe psychological or psychiatric conditions (even with good medical care). Vision Australia and Guide Dogs have been proactive in assisting people with a vision impairment in my workplace. Apart from sign interpreters, I’m not sure what is available to assist people with profound hearing loss. I personally have not hired an employee from a disability background such as Downs Syndrome but would be keen to hear more about the workforce potential of people from this background”

“Employ a number of people with disability, each one in terms of success will vary as with employment of any person. The attitude of the person along with other team members is important, along with providing appropriate support based on the individual’s needs”

“The person is legally blind. He is highly intelligent and committed and fits well within our organisation (is very popular) and with modifications to his work area, is highly competent. I have also employed someone with a mental illness and she too is successful in her role. I have also employed a person with another physical disability but that person was unsuccessful during probation. The reasons for the unsuccessful probation did not relate to her disability”

Figures 14 and 15 indicate respectively how respondents have answered a question relating to the expectations of a person with a hidden disability declaring the disability. Of the respondents whose organisations have employed a person with a disability, 427 answered the question and of those whose organisations have not employed a person with a disability, 204 respondents answered.

There was very little difference in the responses of the two groups with about half expecting that a person should declare and half saying that would not be an expectation.

**Figure 14. Would you expect an applicant with hidden disability to declare the disability? (‘Yes’ respondents)**

![Figure 14](image-url)
Figure 15. Would you expect an applicant with hidden disability to declare the disability? (*No* respondents)

(206 responses)

Figure 16 indicates the respondents whose organisations have not considered using DES to source candidates with a disability to fill a vacancy, and asks why they did not.

Of 198 respondents, more than half (54.04%) reported not knowing about DES, and a little less than half (46.94%) reported the issue not being on their radar. A large minority (38.89%) reported not knowing about the benefits available to employers using DES, and 35.35% reported not knowing how to access the services. Nearly a quarter (23.74%) reported not being confident that a suitable applicant would be provided.

A third of that sample (33.84%) believe there would not be support from the CEO and executive group (11.11%), line managers (12.12%) or the general employee culture (10.61%) for the appointment of a person with a noticeable disability.

Figure 16. If you have never considered using DES to employ a person with a disability, why not?
As a corollary to Figure 16, Figure 17 shows how strongly respondents who have not employed a person with a disability rate the workplace existence of perceptions about high performance.

Fewer than one in five of 209 respondents (18.66%) believe that perception does not exist at all in their organisation, with 81.35% either reserving judgement (35.89%) or taking the view that the perception is moderate (18.66%), low (22.49%) or pervasive (4.31%).

**Figure 17. How strongly do you rate the perception that a person with a disability would not perform as highly as a person without a disability?**

![Figure 17](image)

Figure 18 indicates that only 14.83% of respondents believe that there is no perception in their organisation that employees with a disability are high risk or potentially expensive. Conversely, 85.17% either reserve judgement (36.36%) on the matter or take the view that the perception is moderate (16.27%), low (26.32%) or pervasive (6.22%).

**Figure 18. How strongly do you rate the perception that a person with a disability is high risk and could end up being very expensive?**

![Figure 18](image)
Figure 19 indicates that only a quarter (25.39%) of 193 respondents believe that those negative perceptions have no influence in preventing the employment of people with a disability. Conversely, 74.61% either reserve judgement (26.42%) on the matter or take the view that the perceptions have some negative influence (15.03%), a minor influence (24.87%) or are the main barrier to be overcome (8.29%).

**Figure 19. How strongly do you believe negative perceptions about performance and risk prevent your organisation employing people with disabilities?**

- **25.39%** believe that negative perceptions have no influence on their decision to employ people with disabilities.
- **24.87%** believe there is a minor influence.
- **26.42%** are not sure.
- **15.03%** believe there is some negative influence.
- **8.29%** believe that negative perceptions are the main barrier for their organisation.

**SAMPLE RESPONDENT COMMENTS**

The respondents were asked what was required to make employing people with disabilities more acceptable. A sample group of 155 responded and some of the comments are set out below.

- "Initially, and where appropriate, there needs to be incentives for employers to actively participate. There also needs to be much more direct contact with employers and publicising of programs. In the case of a physical disability, note that there is only one disabled toilet in our building, which is on the ground floor. The landlord has been requested to resolve this but has refused""

- "It would help if there were some funding available to offset some of the cost of initial accommodation that is sometimes required e.g. I had a blind administrator who was eventually very successful in her role but the initial set up costs were quite high""

- "Marketing - many organisations don’t know where to find these people so they can’t hire them""

- "It depends on the level of disability but at the end of the day for many businesses it comes down to cost. If the cost can be offset through government support or positive advertising or image for the company they are more likely to employ people with disabilities. Further to that a better understanding of what people with disabilities are capable of would be beneficial""

- "Greater knowledge and awareness of what is involved, the benefits for the company and how it all works""

- "Assistance needs to be available to organisations to purchase specialised equipment that may be required or to cover the cost of physical changes to the office buildings which may be required""

- "I believe that most organisations recruit the best person for the job whether they have a disability or not""
“Provide information to organisations - make contact with them and offer services. We have provided work experience for some young people with disabilities through an agency and that worked out fine for work experience but as far as permanent roles are concerned we would need more information”

“More guidance provided on how to manage, particularly in the case of depression, bipolar, anxiety etc.”

“More communication from the relevant agencies. More acceptance at a management level”

“More awareness of employment services and benefits available. Training in order to combat stereotypes”

“More information regarding the capabilities of individuals who would meet the job requirements and what on-site support could be provided if required for the candidate to be successful”

“We would not treat a person with a disability any differently, however those people with a disability would need go through the same recruitment process as others. They would need to apply through the channels we use, as opposed to us going to a direct service of just employing someone specifically with a disability”

“More up front information on what a person’s actual disability is and how this person will help a business to achieve its strategic objectives without impacting on its bottom line”

“Reputable Champions”

**SAMPLE RESPONDENT COMMENTS**

The respondents were asked finally whether they had a comment about the Government’s imperative to increase the employment participation of people with a disability. A sample group of 146 responded and some of the comments are set out below.

“Great. Laudable”

“This is an excellent objective, but we have received no direct communication about any programs or any support that is available”

“Strongly support but the weight of extra cost and risk must not fall on employers and fellow employees of the person. Choices to employ those with disabilities must be made in a transparent way so that all factors that may lead to success or failure of the recruitment are on the table and can be assessed and where necessary accommodation made from the get go. It is important that employers are able to release employees of the transition hasn’t worked, so perhaps an extended probation period would assist”

“Did not know about it”

“I think it’s a great imperative, should have happened sooner”

“We don’t get applicants with a disability - although we don’t seek disclosure so unsure if there are hidden disabilities”

“I believe we need to increase the participation in the workforce. However do struggle with programs that ‘force’ employment of a particular type of individual. I am a strong believer in equal employment opportunity and that in this the best person for the role is given the job, irrespective of EEO category”

“It’s not something that can be forced on employers”

“In favour. Past (personal) experience has been very positive”

“The government may have the imperative but for employers it always comes down to employing the
right person for the right job”

“It is a great initiative, however worried that it will become a statistic program, not based on giving skilled people with a disability the opportunity to enter the workforce. It could lead to frustration and dissatisfaction from the people it is supposed to help”

“More must be done, for many reasons, particularly equity, giving everyone a fair go. Also to do with the ageing workforce and not wasting resources. The public sector should be doing more, but the burden, even if only a perceived one, should be shared by the agency as a whole. Many areas in an agency feel under pressure because responsibilities are sometimes increased without a commensurate increase in resources”

“I think it’s a great idea, and businesses are willing but more support is required to help organisations make the necessary internal changes to be ready to actively support this imperative”

“I think this is a fantastic idea”

“I was employed by the State Government through the disability recruitment process some 20+ years ago and now hold a senior management role, so I am definitely an advocate for a diverse workforce”

“Don’t know what it is”

“Great idea, just needs to be implemented and advertised better”
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

CAPABILITIES OF DES PROVIDERS
The Disability Employment Services attempt to combine two very different sectors of the community into the one program. Job seekers involved in these services have typically required support services emanating from education, health and welfare programs that aim to prepare the individual with the necessary skills and qualities required in a work context to become ‘job-ready’. DES providers subsequently work with the business sector to place job seekers in meaningful work.

Several findings of this survey suggest that the health and welfare model from which DES services have largely evolved may at times be at odds with the way the business sector thinks and operates. This is exemplified throughout the quantitative and qualitative results that suggest a deficiency in recruitment practice capabilities such as matching job seekers to the selection criteria. In saying that, it does not diminish the value or quality of support DES provides the job seeker, which are generally very good. However, the practice of simply referring job seekers without necessarily assessing the job criteria appeared to be widespread. That creates reputational damage as employers eventually become impatient with the time losses and disappointment associated with interviewing inappropriate candidates.

‘Who is the customer?’ was also an issue emerging from the data. Many employers felt that the DES provider was more focused on supporting and placing the job seeker than understanding and addressing the needs of the business. ‘Knowing the business’ is a high-level capability adopted by most commercial recruitment agencies along with key account management and relationship building skills. Opportunities exist for DES providers to build on these business capabilities rather than be perceived as operating a case-management approach within a social work model.

AWARENESS OF DES SERVICES
The low level of awareness about DES was surprising and concerning. Even of the employers who have employed a person with a disability, only a third of those (34.73%) used a DES provider to fill the vacancy.

Of those that have never employed someone with a disability, more than half (54.04%) were not aware of the DES services available to them. In addition, nearly half (46.46%) had never thought about the issue of disability employment and so it wasn’t on the organisation’s radar, suggesting that the general community awareness of the matter is low despite successive government attempts to raise awareness. A number of the qualitative comments indicated that respondents had ‘never heard of it’ or ‘didn’t know about it’.

WORKPLACE ATTITUdES
While a proportion of the survey sample was well disposed to the idea of employing someone with a disability, the data indicated pressure from the organisation in many cases with respect to negative cultural attitudes from the executive level, line management and co-workers. Comments such as “It has taken some significant internal marketing to gain acceptance for the reasonable adjustments required” and “More communication is needed from the relevant agencies. More acceptance at a management level”, indicate that the advocates within organisations often have to fight internal cultural battles at all levels to
get results. It’s probably reasonable to conclude that for many others the fight is too hard and not worth the struggle against a culture which is either indifferent or intransigent.

The three questions on perception (see Figures 17, 18 and 19) give some indication of the hard road ahead, with answers to a question on the performance potential of people with a disability revealing that 81.34% of respondents were either unsure or believed moderate, low level or pervasive negative attitudes existed in their organisations. Similarly, a question on the likelihood that employees with a disability would be high risk and expensive revealed that 85.17% of respondents were either reserving judgement or believed moderate, low level or pervasive negative attitudes existed on that question. And on the key question as to whether those negative perceptions prevented organisations employing people with a disability, 74.61% reserved judgement or believed they had some influence or were the main barrier. The slightly lower negative number on that question suggests that despite the widespread negative perceptions, there is sufficient leadership within some organisations to withstand those perceptions and push back.

There are clearly connections between the high levels of negative workplace cultures and perceptions, a general lack of community awareness and the business capability shortcomings of providers. The challenge is to make inroads into community awareness so that the work of service providers and advocates within businesses are not working in isolation and against the odds.