

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Welcome back to the public hearing for the Queensland Productivity Commission inquiry into the NDIS Market in Queensland. We now have our third session, and I'd like to welcome Matthew Gillett from CSIA and WorkAbility and Belinda Drew, who is also representing CSIA and WorkAbility. So, thank you very much for joining us. I understand Matthew that you will be speaking to the WorkAbility submission that was provided in response to our draft report.

And for those joining us today, that submission has been posted to the QPC website this morning. And I understand Belinda, you'll be talking to other issues on behalf of CSIA. So, thank you. Before your presentations, if you wouldn't mind identifying yourself, your name and organisation, for the public record. Thank you, and I'll hand over to you.

MATTHEW GILLETT:

Thanks, Commissioner. My name is Matthew Gillett. I'm a General Manager of Programs at the Community Services Industry Alliance, and I'm also here today as a representative of the WorkAbility Queensland Consortium.

BELINDA DREW:

And my name is Belinda Drew, I'm the Chief Executive Officer of the Community Services Industry Alliance, and I'm also here as a representative of WorkAbility Queensland. Thank you, Commissioner.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Thank you. Matthew, we'll start with you, thanks very much.

MATTHEW GILLETT:

Thanks, Commissioner. And before I start, I'd like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which I join you from today, the beautiful lands of the Quandamooka people on the bayside of these lands we now call Brisbane. And I'd like to pay my respects to Elders past, present, and those emerging. Just by way of quick background for people who are unaware, the Workability Queensland Consortium is a consortium of three community service bodies, Community Services Industry Alliance, National Disability Services, and the Queensland Council of Social Services.

And we've been working on an industry-led approach to the growth and development of the NDIS workforce in Queensland since 2015 and have had the support of Queensland government agencies over that time to deliver a range of projects. Currently we're delivering some training and skills projects on behalf of Queensland government, a research project on behalf of Jobs Queensland, and also some training development and implementation work.

Today I wanted to take the opportunity on behalf of the consortium to, I guess, speak on three key areas from our submission to the draft report. The first is to focus in on the research project that's recently been completed and to bring your attention to some aspects of that report. The second is to talk a little bit about the notion of an employment market stewardship role for governments to support the NDIS, and then some brief comments on some specific aspects of the report from our submission. So, firstly thanks for the opportunity to talk today, and thank you for the inquiry and the report.

Workability welcomes the report and recognises that the Commission has taken notice of the work and the advice of the Workability Consortium. And we can see many of our findings in the work that's being presented. One issue that we wanted to highlight is that we have been working with Jobs Queensland and Central Queensland University over the last 18 months on an NDIS workforce research project. You'll be aware that there's a number of regional research project reports available through our website.

There's also a state-wide report that was finished in 2020, and we had hoped that it would be available in the public realm by now. But as these things do, they often take longer than you hope. And so, I guess we wanted to bring your attention to some of the aspects of that report, some of the recommendations, and encourage the Commission to approach Jobs Queensland about the detail of that report. So, the report has focused on a review of the kind of labour market data, the NDIS data, a review of job ads, demand, job growth projections, and provides some detail around workforce supply, workforce shortages, and workforce demand into the future.

And also looks at skills, supply, and demand, and projections for the future. There's a range of qualitative data from interviews and focus groups that occurred around the state during 2019-20. And we're focused in on aspects of recruitment difficulty, recruitment processes, retention issues in the industry, skills requirements, roles and demand, workforce utilisation, and importantly on the resilience of the workforce. None of the findings will be a huge surprise to people who've looked in on the NDIS workforce, but in the broad, we certainly found that there's significant increase in demand for workers, a significant increase in supply as well.

But nevertheless many organisations are reporting difficulty attracting the appropriate talent for the roles that they have. The shortages most serious in allied health roles. But the largest volume of the shortage is in the range of frontline service roles at the paraprofessional and sub-professional levels. In terms of training, we certainly found that the supply of training, in particular focus to disability work, has not kept pace with the increase in the workforce. And we believe that that's a real concern, that we see certainly evidence that growth in the frontline entry-level roles has far outpaced the delivery of training.

And we're concerned about what that means for the level of skills and the level of investment in professional development for that very large and growing workforce. At the same time, we've certainly seen a significant response from the training sector, but there are many areas where we'd like to see a further effort to try to deliver more training into the sector that's specific to the needs of people with disability, and also in a manner that works for the kind of highly-casualised highly-dispersed workforce that we're dealing with. In the draft report, WorkAbility Queensland have made a number of recommendations.

They are obviously our draft recommendations at this stage, but we did want to talk briefly to the sorts of things that the report has highlighted. Two of the recommendations have actually been reflected in the Commission's draft report, they being a customised traineeship that would support the kind of training pathway that I've just mentioned that would enable casual workers with off the site rate supervision arrangements to be able to undertake a traineeship and to complete a qualification, or indeed a skillset as required for the role.

And the secondary is that of allied health assistants. And that's been a high priority in WorkAbility's workforce since 2015. And we're very pleased to see the recommendation from the report, that the Queensland government invest in supporting a pilot for that role which works well in aged care and hospital settings, some areas of community health, but certainly hasn't reached the volume of implementation that would be helpful in the NDIS. And there are some structural and practical issues that a part of what would help us to identify and address. So, we do encourage the Commission to try and get your hands on a copy of the draft report.

There's some rich information in there that I think will be helpful for the consideration by the Commission. The second area that we wanted to cover today was in relation to the notion of the role of governments in providing market stewardship role in the area of employment. And we know that there are some comments in the report that indicate that the responsibility for addressing workforce issues is that of the employer.

And I think we heard from one of the speakers this morning that there are many difficulties for employers in being able to take on that responsibility on their own. The pricing model, the highly transactional nature of the payment model means that we have workers coming in with short shifts, not necessarily the kind of hours that they would prefer is... For some it's not significant pay levels that I would prefer. And the number of working conditions make it very difficult for employers to provide for the recruitment strategies, the professional development that would provide quality work and secure a workforce over time.

So, our view is, as the Queensland government has invested over time, in efforts to try to provide some leadership, we believe that the Queensland government along with the Commonwealth government can play a role in helping to steward that employment and training market so that employers are able to have ready access to the workforce they need, and be supported to provide quality work that encourages workers to stay in their roles longer. And there are really critical factors in the success of (AUDIO DISTORTS) addressing needs of people with disability.

And then thirdly, as we've mentioned in our submission, we've just spoken to a few of the areas of recommendations, findings, and information source requests. I wanted to highlight, I guess, that issue of pricing as I've mentioned earlier, that the current pricing arrangements make it very difficult for employers to invest in the kinds of development and professional development supervision and support for workers that was available under the previous arrangements. And that makes it very difficult for people to attract and retain a workforce. So, we see that the link between adjusting the price cap to the ability for workers to... Sorry, the ability for the employers to provide adequate work. The secondary I wanted to mention was in relation to data gaps.

And through the research that I've described, one of the key data sources that we discovered that's been most helpful in understanding the volume and the nature of growth in the workforce has been Yellowcard data, so the data on worker screening. And we believe that that data source could be more fruitfully used to understand the growth development and profile of the NDIS workforce. And there may well be other administrative data sets that could help to provide those insights as well. Probably the most recent one that's worth considering is the new portable long service scheme for the community services industry.

And whether with the assistance of the scheme we could access much more real-time data on what this workforce looks like and therefore inform the kind of workforce planning and development that's required. We really very much (LAUGHS) reward the Commission for suggesting that we try to harmonise some of the regulations across these various sectors.

That's been a significant issue for the services in this sector for some time, and particularly those who are delivering in various sectors, aged care and disability in particular where there are very different regulatory frameworks with often the same issues needing to be demonstrated and responded to in very different ways.

So, we're pleased to see the recommendation that the Quality and Safeguards Commission and other relevant Commissions speak to each other. I guess we highlight that our understanding is that some of that conversation has been occurring between the department of social services and the department of health at the federal level and that perhaps the Queensland government needs to approach those agencies as well as part of that agenda. Those are really the main things that we wanted to highlight. So, I might pause there and hand over to Belinda.

BELINDA DREW:

Thanks, Matthew. Thank you, Commissioner. I just, I guess, reinforcing Matthew's presentation that it's certainly our firm view after many years working in this space that quality outcomes for people with disability are synonymous with a quality workforce. And that part of that experience in terms of the equality or the outcome in terms of quality workforce will come not only from us filling those roles over time, but ensuring actually that the work that people do is quality work.

And that is rewarding, particularly as Matthew says, for that huge number of frontline staff that go out every day and do really important work across our community. So, thank you, Matthew. And I guess that just leaves me, Commissioner, to three things that we also wanted to raise more broadly in terms of CSIA's particular interests in the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme over time.

The first of those relates to employment of people with disabilities. And that has been a key and core part of a range of work that we've done now over many years in terms of the social and economic inclusion of people with disabilities and the work that we have done, I guess, in encouraging employers across the community, but particularly employers in the community services space more broadly to consider people with disabilities as a rich and a source of employees in their own organisations.

And we understand like many people that with that opportunity for people with disabilities comes obvious economic benefits, financial benefits, social inclusion, but for the organisations themselves, not only a rich source of lived experience in terms of the work that people do, but more than that, an untapped an important set of skills and capabilities that people with disabilities would bring to those roles.

So, I think in the context of the workforce piece, that's again certainly something that WorkAbility, but also in our work across CSIA, we've been keen to highlight is, as we build that workforce, we really should think long and hard about how we engage people with disability in those roles over

time. And that work persists as a focus for us in, I guess leading to the second point that we would have liked, we'd like to raise more generally, which relates to the aspects of the report that raise questions about thin markets, a really critical topic of conversation in a state like Queensland, so decentralised with of course, many, many remote locations where services need to be delivered.

And we would just like to highlight, I guess for the Commission, based on some early work that we did that we believe very strongly that there is a role for government to play in direct Commissioning of services and supports in thin markets. And you know, as we understand it, the mechanisms are there within the scheme itself for that direct Commissioning to occur. But it is not out of the question either for state governments more broadly to consider separately from that their role directly in those efforts.

And we think that in terms of the important aspects of that, you know, to bring people with disabilities in those locations, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote locations to the center of those conversations through processes that focus on human-centred design to consider the investment that flows from the National Disability Insurance Scheme, as an addition to assets that already exist locally, including already existing and other investment in community services, but the broad breadth of other assets that exist across communities at the level of small business, local government, and all of the plethora of human and community networks that exist.

We did some initial work in that area in the Burnett area, the central Queensland area of Queensland, and Commissioned a report that enabled us to take a look in that area that we've worked, at the existing assets in that community, and at the possibility of bringing people with disabilities and community together around those assets to see then the investment through the NDIS as an opportunity to leverage those community assets in direct Commissioning processes. And we believe that work should continue into the future. The third and final thing I wanted to raise was related to outcomes and data in the scheme.

And as we've kind of travelled through implementation, we continue and that I realise in some respects but, you know, towards the more fulsome operation of the scheme, it really is incumbent on us now to think long and hard about data and outcomes. And you know, I know that that is a key concern both at Commonwealth and state level. I have the opportunity to participate on the advisory committee of the National Disability Data Asset and its development, which the Queensland government has a stake in.

And I just wanted to highlight for the Commission, I guess, that the development of that data asset in its pilot phase, and hopefully beyond its pilot phase into a full-blown asset, is really something critical to our ability over time to be able to tell how successful we've been, not just in the scheme, but I think more broadly in terms of changing the lives of people with disabilities, perhaps even over time having some opportunity there to kind of crack that eternal nut of getting beyond the silos and thinking about things like link data across human services systems. So, I guess on that point, and even referencing the workforce conversation we were having previously you know, data really in a way is already a big conversation.

Clearly really, really important, but context is everything. I think certainly finish, in terms of workability, something we have struggled over time to really get good, clear data to have that not only shows us something about the current context that we're in, the current state, but also help us to understand what the future state might look like. So, I'll conclude my comments there, Commissioner. If there's any questions, we'd be happy to answer them.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Thank you both very much for those presentations. And let me first start by thanking CSIA and WorkAbility for their participation and ongoing support of the inquiry through meeting with the inquiry staff and sharing relevant documentation with us along with submissions on both the issues paper and our draft report. So, thank you very much for that. Certainly the issues that you've raised are quite central to our draft report. I do have a couple of questions for you. Maybe I'll start with the issue of data that you raised, Belinda.

And obviously we have sought very much to make sure that our report is evidence-based. And so, we've also had our own challenges in being able to put together the quantitative data to get a full assessment of the NDIS market. And I'd be really interested in your perspectives on where you see the biggest data gaps. And I guess the second question which relates to your comment that you made earlier, Belinda, around how improving data will improve the lives of people with disability. So, maybe I could just start with where you think the biggest data gaps are and then why it's important to address data issues for outcomes.

BELINDA DREW:

Thank you, Commissioner. I mean, there are very big questions in terms of data gaps. I mean, there are probably, it's fair to say, many, and it sounds like you've had experience of that. If we take the example of workforce, we have gaps in that area about the number of workers that are on the ground, which Matthew has already well-articulated. We have gaps in terms of what roles they fill.

And we also have a whole range of gaps in other data, including the number of full-time, part-time jobs. So, I think there are aspects of that information that are available. Sorry, there are - some of that information exists, but it is unavailable to us. And one of the things that I think is really exciting about the data asset is that one of its core objectives is to seek out where that data is, to find ways to pool it together in a usable form, because that's the other key issue. Even where the data exists, it's not in a usable form, and then to link that data.

And I think that last thing is the really critical bit in terms of answering the question about how it can be useful for people with disabilities, their families, and their advocate. It's, is the answer answering the question, how does that data, what story does that data tell and how does that data help us to change the things that really need changing? And then I guess the other answer I'd offer around data in terms of its benefit to people with disabilities is an observation so far in the conversations we've been having around the data asset, is that much of the data is focused on what happens in the system and not what happens in people's lives.

And so, to make that concrete, if we go back to the question of people with disability and employment, maybe we want to know less about unemployment and data from the system about

that and more about the sorts of things that people with disability would want to know in order to make a pathway to employment easier for them.

And so I would reflect that some of those things are not about service delivery and they're not about the disability field, but are about how other parts of the economy work or don't work, about inclusion or lack of inclusion. And so, I think there's a fantastic opportunity to work with people with disabilities and their families to understand the sorts of data and information they would want to help solve those sorts of issues and indeed meet people's aspirations.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Thank you. Perhaps I could take up a point that Matthew raised around the view expressed that pricing is somewhat constraining workforce development because of the cost (UNKNOWN) training on providers. I just wondered if there are any other features of the NDIS from your perspective that might represent impediments to development of the NDIS workforce.

MATTHEW GILLET:

Well, thanks Commissioner. I guess there's a very big challenge in the fundamental nature of the NDIS, I guess, with the increased focus on the choice of provider and control over how services are provided means that for the first time, employers are needing to staff the support at the times and in the manner and in the locations that people with disability require. And that makes rostering very, very difficult. It makes it difficult for organisations to be able to guarantee a certain number of hours in a particular week.

It makes it difficult for employers to be able to have a ready workforce to respond quickly when new participants join their organisation or when support needs change. So, I think everybody supports choice and control, so I'm not suggesting that that needs to change. But I think it's important to understand that when employers are criticised for not providing the kind of working conditions, it's not by choice for the most part. The employers are responding to the transactional nature of the scheme and the way that they're funded.

I think it's also important to understand that the nature of the scheme has also focused very much, rightly, on face-to-face contact with participants and what's suffered through that very strong focus is the amount of peer learning, supervision, team meetings, and all of those informal supports for the workforce that has actually traditionally been our way of developing the professional skills of this workforce. And so, as organisations are less able to provide those avenues, I don't think we've yet worked out how to provide that kind of professional development in the absence of those mechanisms.

We've also lost a layer of workforce, or depleted a layer of workforce that did have those skills and were responsible for imparting those on the workforce, particularly the new workforce. And I think also the issues around training, there's a very strong need for employers to fill the shifts and support the individuals when they join the organisation. And so, they're often needing to grab people who may not be fully skilled in the role, but needing to then deploy them as quickly as possible. And where under the previous arrangements they may have had the luxury of a little bit more time and buddy shifts or learning and development or even formal training, that impetus is not there with

the... Sorry, that opportunity is less there because of the impetus to get people on the tools as quickly as possible.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

And I guess, related to the issue of pricing and wages, is there any evidence that providers have adjusted wages up as a way of securing workforce, particularly in regional and remote parts of the state where it can be quite challenging to find suitable staff?

MATTHEW GILLETT:

Yeah, thanks Commissioner. That question was put to me by Commission staff the other day. So, I'm not aware directly of whether that's occurred. But I have actually put it to our team as a question. I'm happy to provide that feedback out of session if that's helpful. I think certainly what I'm aware of is that some organisations have used guaranteed hours, you know, a preference, been able to offer people who they want to retain the opportunity to choose the shifts that they would like to work. The clients and families that they want to work mostly with as ways of encouraging retention. I'm not 100% on how, to the extent to which wages have been used for that as well.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

OK. And you made an earlier comment around supply of training, not keeping up. And I recall you spoke to the issue of some gaps in training. I just wanted to clarify, we're talking there about on the job training gaps or more formal training through, say, the TAFE system.

MATTHEW GILLETT:

I was referring mostly to the vocational training system. So, the qualifications and skill sets that you would expect to support the skilling of the entry-level workforce has increased significantly, but not to the level that the workforce itself has increased. I think the employers are focusing very much on induction training to bring their new workforce up to speed and have continued that investment and taking responsibility at that level. But it's focused very much on the mandatory and the kind of baseline, if you like, and the additional skills development that you might see in the past, as I said through professional development or formal training is probably less available now.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

And Matthew, you spoke earlier to the role that government has in relation to workforce development. And there are a number of initiatives underway to support workforce development. I'd be really interested in the view of CSIA and WorkAbility around where there might be gaps in current government initiatives.

MATTHEW GILLETT:

I think probably the... I think it's... We've tried to take an ecosystem approach where there are resources in the system, in employment programs, in training programs, in other kinds of government initiatives, and obviously, the employment service providers and disability employment services. But not all of that effort is properly directed towards this workforce. There's a very strong focus in the vocational and employment areas on hard skills and hard industries. And we've found that it takes considerable effort to reorient those resources towards the NDIS.

So, I think it's helping those system players to understand who's likely to be successful as an NDIS worker, how do we support those people to understand and select themselves for those kinds of roles, and then what are the training pathways that would support people to be job-ready as a pathway to those qualifications? So, I think they're the entry-level roles. The other areas that we've identified as some of the emerging roles, and we certainly heard this morning around successful coordination and the community development aspects and the capacity building aspects of the scheme.

They're relatively new roles, and WorkAbility has done some work to fill some of those gaps. But there's certainly areas like behaviour support and the higher clinical skills. Again there's, I guess, an opportunity to develop an ongoing professional development program across the state that would help to professionalise this direct frontline workforce.

**BELINDA DREW:**

Commissioner, if I could add to Matthew's comments. So, I think that idea of employment stewardship in the context of this space has shown itself to be critically important in what I think are so far in Australia, standout investments that this Queensland government has made since 2015 in the effort of supply of quality workforce. So we acknowledge that that's been a real role of leadership in this state.

And to Matthew's well-made points, that job is not done and needs to persist. But that role of employment steward is also kind of understated still in Queensland in relation to the economic benefits that flow from those jobs, particularly in regional and remote Queensland, and the role of governments in any other industry where there is supply of roles that outstrips the ability of an industry to fill them is usually a place where governments come rushing in in order to help because employment outcomes, jobs are important in the economy. And we would argue, of course, that our industry is no different in that regard.

So, that role of employment steward in simply realising the economic benefit of these roles is really important alongside that more nuanced and detailed role that certainly the government has been playing with WorkAbility over time to actually make that a reality, if you like, and to that in a way that delivers some level of quality. So, I think the two things are simultaneously important in that role.

**DR KAREN HOOPER:**

And Belinda, you raised a really important issue earlier around employment of people with a disability. Do you see any outcomes from the introduction of the NDIS in terms of giving people with a disability greater access to employment opportunities? Or do you think the challenges in that space are largely around finding the opportunities for people with a disability?

**BELINDA DREW:**

Well, maybe it's certainly both. And I would observe that in terms of a sort of genuine transformation in the system for people with disabilities in relation to employment, it is still early days. Though I acknowledge there are many good efforts that are happening largely at a kind of community level to change that. So, across our stakeholder group, there are numbers of

organisations that are actively engaged in the task of supporting people with a disability to attain the skills, to find the pathways into great employment outcomes.

So, I think we're early days, but starting to see some great changes in that system. Matthew may have some other comments to make about the employment side of that more specifically, but I think the other thing that we would highlight is, again consistent with my prior statements, the enormously valuable role community service organisations have to play in offering opportunities in employment to people with disabilities. And we really are only just putting our toe in the water there. And indeed, you might argue in some regards that the private sector is leading us in ways at the moment that they are not be.

You know, we would argue this is core business for our industry to be front-footed in this regard. So, I think there's a task of education, awareness raising. There's also much, much more dialogue that has to happen between people with disabilities seeking employment outcomes and employers to build a deeper understanding. And I think then just a whole range of practical investment in supporting employers to deliver those kinds of changes in their workplace that would help them to be genuinely inclusive.

And we did some great work with the Australian Disability Network, ADN, during the course of the prior year and the year before, investigating how we might bring employers to the table and held a series of round table events across the state. So, we know there's an appetite there across our industry to act in that way. It's really just putting the concerted effort into continuing to help that to happen.

DR KAREN HOOPER:

Look, thanks so much for your oral submission today. Clearly these are issues highly relevant to the inquiry and our terms of reference. So, we examine workforce issues in the draft enquiry report as you know, and certainly workforce shortages were a common theme in our consultations, and relatedly the impact that has on service availability, particularly outside of metropolitan areas. And I know that Belinda, you touched on thin markets a little earlier.

So, again, thank you very much for your participation today. And again, thank you for the submission that you have provided to the inquiry on the draft report. So, we might close that session there. So, thanks again.

MATTHEW GILLETT:

Thank you.