



# **YNOT Submission to *The next generation of employment services: Discussion paper***

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## Introduction

The Youth Network of Tasmania (YNOT) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the *Next generation of employment services: Discussion paper*. Young people are a cohort that experience high levels of unemployment and underemployment (Brotherhood of St Laurence 2017), so it is important services to support them to gain employment can work effectively in meeting their needs.

## Services to support young people looking for employment

It is important people seeking support to find employment can have services tailored to their needs. The Youth Network of Tasmanian (YNOT) has long advocated for youth-specific employment services so they can be tailored to the needs of young people because young people can face barriers and challenges to employment that can differ from other cohorts.

Supporting employment services staff to deliver tailored services will be an important feature in a new model of employment services. As the Discussion Paper references, 'jobactive employment services consultants have an average caseload of 148 job seekers'. Caseloads this high are not conducive to providing high quality services to people looking for work. Even if a significant proportion of these case loads were people who engage through a new online portal, it would be difficult for any staff member to provide targeted services to large volume of people.. Case loads need to be reduced so that staff have the capacity to spend more time on providing targeted support to people looking for work, rather than administrative tasks. Reducing case loads will provide staff with more time to build rapport with the people accessing employment services, which will help them to gain a better understanding of their needs and provide more targeted support. Building rapport is particularly important when working with young people.

YNOT has an extensive history of consulting with young people on topics, such as employment and education. Young people consistently tell us, when it comes to getting assistance to find employment or find education and training pathways, that they want to be supported by someone who has knowledge of industry, contacts with local employers and who understands their needs (TYF 2014). This is important because they need to know what employers are looking for and have targeted support to identify how to prepare for employment, particularly when it may be their first job.

Reducing case loads is important because employment services staff need to have the time to develop relationships and connections to local employers and networks, increase their knowledge of different industries, and develop a greater awareness of barriers and issues people may face to employment. YNOT understands that there are some job service

providers who have staff that specialise in delivering services to particular cohorts (such as young people), however, this is not consistent. Providing opportunities for staff to attend networking events, training and professional development opportunities would support staff to improve their skills and knowledge to deliver the best service possible for the people they work with.

There will also need to be flexibility in the new model around what an 'outcome' looks like for an individual who is accessing employment services. Under the current model, employment services are assessed on generic outcomes that create barriers for some people looking for work. For example, young people may have gained part time employment but do not meet the threshold to be removed from a jobactiv caseload. YNOT is aware of situations where young people have not fulfilled their jobactiv requirements because they were required to work, which created issues for both the provider and young person.

There also needs to be greater transparency for people about the type of employment services available to them and what each service can provide. Currently, there is very little information for job seekers to make an informed choice about the service provider they engage with. Even if job seekers can access information, they may not have the capacity to determine which service is best for them. Additional support may be required for job seekers to make informed decisions before accessing services.

YNOT is also aware that there are young people who are attending programs to meet their jobactiv requirements but have not received an appropriate level of information from their employment service about what is involved or why they are attending the program. In addition, some young people have not received information from services about support available to them, such as reimbursement costs for transport to engage with mutual obligation requirements (although there still is a barrier in finding this money upfront, some costs are not covered and transport options may be unreliable). This type of information may seem straight forward and easily accessible, however, young people may need additional support to be guided through the information and how it applies to their circumstances. This highlights the need for intensive, ongoing support to work towards to best outcomes for young people who are looking for employment.

YNOT is also concerned that the elements covered in the discussion paper are highly ambitious given that the scope of the review is limited to the same level of funding as the current agreement. Many young people using employment services would likely benefit from more targeted and intensive support. A new model needs to ensure young people who

need this level of support have access to it.

## Online employment services

Increasing the use of apps and online services will provide some young people with greater flexibility and independence for engaging with employment services. Apps and online services will be most appropriate for those people who have digital literacy skills and access to information technology.

It is important to highlight that despite young people often being perceived as digitally literate, this is not always the case. For example, young people in Tasmania are less likely to have digital literacy skills than their counterparts in other jurisdictions. The Australian Digital Inclusion Index, released in 2017, showed that Tasmania is the least digitally inclusive state. This includes issues such as access to the internet, affordability of internet services and digital ability. Results from YNOT's consultation with young people in Tasmania on Technology in 2017, found that young people had varying levels of self confidence in using technology (TYF 2017). Therefore, assumptions about the ability of people to engage with services online cannot be assumed both due to access and digital literacy.

YNOT is also aware that many people are already using online apps and services to look for employment but are finding it difficult to gain employment. This is highlighted in the discussion paper's case study of Stephanie, who is already looking for work and motivated to do so but still faces barriers to employment. It is important that if people identify they need for face-to-face support, they can self select to have an increase in the support provided to them.

It has also been mentioned that the use of online video-calling services, such as Skype, could be utilised for appointments with people looking for work and employment services. While this may be useful for some people, YNOT does not believe this benefits the person looking for work, particularly when they may not have had an interview before. Having face-to-face appointments can support people to develop soft skills, which the discussion paper highlights is wanted by many employers from their employees. While the use of this type of technology may be appropriate for some job seekers, it would need to be determined on a case-by-case basis to ensure that appropriate support is provided.

Finally, relying on online apps and services may overlook employment opportunities that are promoted locally and through word of mouth, and not advertised online. YNOT understands there are many small businesses in Tasmania who employ people by using their networks

rather than advertising. YNOT has also conducted consultations with young people on the topic of employment and they have consistently highlighted their struggle to find employment, work experience or volunteer opportunities in their local communities, particularly in regional areas. It is important employment services have strong local networks to take advantage of these opportunities and work with job seekers to connect them to appropriate opportunities.

In summary, using online apps and services can provide some flexibility in how employment services are delivered. However, it is important that the same approach is not provided to all job seekers and that their individual needs can be met, whether this is online or face-to-face.

### Assessment tools

YNOT has advocated for employment services that can be tailored for young people by identifying employment opportunities that align with their skills and interests, including training opportunities that may form a pathway to employment. We know this approach is more likely to be successful in delivering more positive and lasting outcomes for young people as the activities more closely align with their goals and motivations. A tool that can be used to identify these strengths, as well as areas where a person may need additional support, will be important for ensuring the effective allocation of resources and services to that person.

The discussion paper explores the possibility of using an assessment tool that can be used to identify the skills and strengths of people, where the results could be matched with job opportunities. YNOT supports the principle of this in using a strengths-based approach; however, this would need to be carefully implemented. A generic assessment tool has the risk of presenting job candidates as very similar to each other to employers. People are unique and bring their own perspectives, skills and experience to the workplace that may not be captured in an online assessment tool. Therefore, it may be possible for employers to overlook candidates based on the results of their assessment.

In addition, we know many young people need support to identify the skills that they possess and how this translates to different education, training and employment opportunities for them. Young people have consistently identified in our Statewide consultations that they want a combination of face-to-face and online support to assist them to navigate employment pathways (TYF 2015). Young people have said they often need face-to-face support to identify the skills they have, how their skills relate to education, training and employment opportunities, and how opportunities may apply to their life, even,

if they are capable of using a digital platform. This is particularly relevant for young people who do not have support people in their personal networks who can assist them in this area.

YNOT also believes it is important for people to have the opportunity to identify when their needs change and/or have a reassessment to ensure that they continue to receive appropriate services. Young people may need time to build rapport with the worker they engage with before they feel more comfortable disclosing information that would be useful to employment services in identifying the right support and opportunities for them.

Reassessments would provide a proactive opportunity to identify this.

In summary, YNOT supports utilising strengths-based tools that identify motivations and goals of individuals so support services and opportunities for training and employment can be better aligned to their needs and interests. This needs to be within a system that can provide face-to-face support for young people to explore these opportunities and build rapport with a worker to do so.

## Regional and local approaches

YNOT agrees that having regional and local approaches may be more successful in achieving outcomes than a generic, one-sized approach. In addition to identifying opportunities for employment in regional and local communities, there also needs to be an understanding of the barriers to employment that may be common in these communities. For example, transport issues, intergenerational poverty and low school completion rates. This will ensure solutions better meet the needs of job seekers. For example, training could be provided in a community after it has been identified there is a skills gap in a particular industry. However, if transport is a key challenge for job seekers in the community, the potential benefits could be missed if this is not considered in how training participants can be supported to overcome this barrier.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, YNOT is pleased to see the Discussion Paper has a focus on providing people looking for employment with more targeted and intensive support. YNOT believes having flexibility to deliver services that meet the needs of young people and recognise their skills and interests will work towards delivering positive and lasting outcomes. However, YNOT is also aware there needs to be the appropriate structures in place to enable this. This includes support for employment services staff to deliver this type of service, acknowledging the limitations of tools such as online tools and assessments, and identifying challenges and strengths at a community level.

## References

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