



**Developmental Educators
Australia Incorporated**

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28th September 2018

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: Submission to the Productivity Commission: National Disability Agreement Review

Thank you kindly for considering this late submission for the National Disability Agreement Review. We appreciate the opportunity to raise a matter, which we feel is of relevance to the Review.

This submission relates to a point made in the National Disability Agreement Issues Paper (p12): “In its review of NDIS Costs (2017), the Productivity Commission identified a lack of clarity in the roles and responsibilities of governments related to: ...

- workforce development, including ensuring there are enough qualified workers to deliver high quality supports”

Introduction

[Developmental Educators Australia Inc](#) (DEAI) is the national professional body for Developmental Educators. Developmental Educators are disability professionals who have undertaken 4 year Bachelor, or Master’s level disability specific degrees.

Developmental Education has its roots in South Australia; the Bachelor of Disability and Developmental Education (BDDE) is offered by Flinders University (internal and external modes). Previous iterations of this degree date back to the early 1990’s.

Developmental Education is now an emerging discipline, prior to it being relatively unknown, even within South Australia. This is a very exciting development for the profession and we feel also for the disability sector. A significant contributor to the increased profile was the inclusion of Developmental Educators by the SA Commissioner for Public Sector Employment in 2011, as an allied health discipline. The other factor was the recognition by

the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) of Developmental Educators as professionals, and the DEAI as their governing body (see [NDIS Guide to Suitability July 2018](#)) in approximately 2014.

Developmental Educators are highly skilled multi-disciplinary disability specialists with passion and expertise in fostering the skills, independence and quality of life of individuals with developmental and/or acquired disabilities. They have a practical approach and work holistically across the life span to address issues which may affect the function, independence and social inclusion of individuals with disability, their families and carers.

Developmental Educators implement and develop methodologies that enable the application of effective strategies to support the individual developmental learning goals of people who experience challenges such as acquired brain injury, physical and neurological disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, intellectual disability, and other disabilities. They also work closely with families and caregivers, and other allied health professionals who may be involved in the support of an individual.

For the skills noted above, Developmental Educators are highly valued and sought after professionals in the disability sector, by both parents of individuals with disability and disability service providers to provide developmental and behavioural assessments and intervention supports in line with NDIS Plan.

Membership of Developmental Educators with the DEAI has been steadily growing; the DEAI currently has approximately 180 full members and interest is ever increasing as the NDIS rolls out across the country (due to NDIA and NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission's registration requirements).

Concern raised for consideration

Herein lies the concern we wish to bring to your attention. In line with the increasing demand for service provision there is an increase in advertised vacancies by agencies seeking to recruit Developmental Educators, in South Australia in particular, however it would seem there are not sufficient Developmental Educators and new graduates to meet this demand. National Disability Services (NDS-SA) has been gathering data on recruitment of disability professionals and we have been advised they have found that one of the disciplines which is difficult to recruit is Developmental Education.

While the number of enrolments in the BDDE (and Master of Disability Policy and Practice), Flinders University, and thus graduates, has been steadily increasing given professional career pathways have significantly improved and increased, the DEAI is very concerned that one disability specific Bachelor degree is not able to support the increasing demand for this profession, developed through the roll out of the NDIS.

The DEAI is concerned that there are no other disability specific Bachelor degrees offered by other universities. Previous undergraduate degrees such as the Bachelor of Applied Science – Intellectual Disability, RMIT, and Bachelor of Applied Science - Disability Studies, Deakin University, were discontinued many years ago.

Recognition of the profession of Developmental Education is on the rise across Australia as the BDDE (and Master of Disability Policy and Practice) are offered in external and online

modes, and the DEAI also recognises other disability specific Master degrees from other Australian universities for full membership. We welcome the renewed interest in tertiary related disability studies and believe this was very much needed. As mentioned, interest in membership with the DEAI is also on the rise nationally, which has been created by the requirement to be registered with a relevant and recognised professional body, when providing certain NDIS services. We welcome this new standard of quality assurance in service provision for individuals with disability.

It is a well-known fact that the disability workforce requires a significant expansion to be able to provide the supports and services made available through the NDIS Plans. Various endeavours in all the States are working to address this, however we have not heard any suggestions that seek to address the shortage of disability specific undergraduate studies to produce highly qualified disability professionals. At the same time there are daily accounts by the media, professionals, service providers, and individuals with disability and their families/carers, about the lack of access to highly skilled disability professionals, which means NDIS funds remain unspent, but more critically, NDIS participants go without the necessary therapy and/or supports.

While we understand the disability allied health workforce is made up of various other disciplines (i.e., Psychology, Occupational Therapy, Speech Pathology, Physio Therapy etc) we feel Developmental Educators add significant value due to their diverse disability specific expertise. An example of this is the expertise Developmental Educators have in the Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) area. Developmental Education is currently the only undergraduate degree which prepares graduates to become PBS practitioners.

While this Review is being undertaken, the competencies for PBS practitioners are still being developed by the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission. In South Australia Developmental Educators are well known for the PBS expertise and contribute a great deal to the service provision in this area. We feel strongly that an increase in Developmental Educators and better recognition of their PBS expertise across Australia will provide much needed workforce support.

Conclusion

The DEAI respectfully recommends this Review gives consideration to the growth of the profession of Developmental Education by:

- Reinstatement of disability specific tertiary undergraduate degrees across Australia to support the demand for highly skilled disability professionals.
- Recognition of Developmental Educators as allied health professionals by all state governments across Australia, to promote interest and further career pathways of this profession.
- Recognition of Developmental Educators in all states as Positive Behaviour Support Practitioners.

We thank you sincerely for the opportunity to contribute to this Review and we look forward to the final Report.

Kind Regards,

Jose Koppelman-Guthrie
Chairperson

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