



# EMPLOY OUTSIDE THE BOX

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The rewards of a diverse workforce

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## Message From ACCI CEO



Since its launch in 2012, the messages within *Employ Outside the Box* have resonated strongly with the business community and government. Those messages continue to be important and have not changed. It still makes good business sense for the Australian business community to consider their options for diversifying their workforce. Employing outside the box is not about businesses acting as charities or taking over government's role in supporting our most disadvantaged. Instead it is about businesses meeting their skills and labour needs by engaging people who they may not have previously considered but who are willing and able to do the job.

The statistics show the stark reality of our ageing labour force. At the same time, millions of Australians who could be earning through work are receiving welfare or are not engaged at all. Transitioning people from welfare to work will not only cut the nation's welfare bill and increase tax inputs; it will also increase the spending power of significant portion of the adult population. More people earning means more people spending - this means business grows.

*Employ Outside the Box* – the rewards of a diverse workforce is the lead document in the series examining the potential of the Australian working age population to help better meet the skills and labour needs of business and help continue Australia's economic growth. Although our analysis makes recommendations to government, it is primarily aimed at business leaders, decision makers and stakeholders.

*Employ Outside the Box* has been complemented by the employer guides focused on Mature Age workers, People with a Disability and more recently Indigenous Australians. This series of publications highlight the fact that engaging a workforce outside the box does not mean a fundamental rethink of business strategy, nor does it mean additional risk. It does mean taking positive steps to consider a broad range of workforce options for the benefit of each business as well as the Australian economy. ACCI will continue to add to the series to help employers tap into an unsourced workforce.

Kate Carnell  
ACCI CEO



# Employ Outside The Box

The Rewards Of A Diverse Workforce



## Skilled labour is vital for Australia's future.

Our population is ageing. To maintain our standard of living we need to both prolong the working life of those who are in the later stages of their working life and to draw as many new entries into the workforce as possible.

Our economic growth and future prosperity depends greatly on our ability to supply business with the labour force needed to operate productively. An enormous shift in demographics through the aging of our population means that this is not going to be easy.

Right under our noses, there's an enormous untapped resource of workers, and all it will take to open this reservoir is for organisations to embrace hiring practices that are outside the box, hiring people who are capable of doing the job, not just the type of person we've always hired. Widening the base of potential employees and contractors is good for business and good for the economy.

There are some challenges to overcome for business and government in boosting work opportunities for all Australians. [Business people need to be encouraged to rethink their engagement strategies, to learn there can be real benefits to hiring someone who may not be the norm.](#) For government, of course, it is getting the policies and support mechanisms right to assist both business and job seekers.

ACCI calls on business to *Employ Outside the Box* when hiring new employees or contractors. Hiring someone from outside the traditional pool of workers isn't about taking a risk or an act of charity. It makes sense from an economic as well as a business perspective to embrace the opportunity to diversify the workforce, securing future skills and labour and boosting the nation's economic prosperity.

The aim of this series is to encourage businesses to diversify their workforce. By providing a clear business case and a simple, systematic approaches to reviewing internal policy and procedures, we hope to help businesses *Employ Outside the Box*.



## Setting The Scene



The economic argument for increasing workforce participation is well established. Australians are ageing and our productivity needs boosting. The 2010 Intergenerational Report estimates that the number of people in Australia aged from 65 to 84 will more than double over the next 40 years, with the number of people 85 years and older set to quadruple. Australia will need to grow its workforce in order to fill the void left by workers leaving the workforce and ensure that we have the skills and capacity to support both an older population and a growing economy.

The extent of the problem presents a stark reminder for employers seeking to fill vacancies in the future<sup>1</sup>:

- The population's median age in 2010 was 36.9 years, up from 32.1 years in 1990, and this is expected to continue to rise.
- The workforce aged over 45 is now around 31% and those under 25 only 17%.
- By 2050, nearly one-quarter of the population will be aged 65 and over, compared to 13% today.
- By 2050, there will only be 2.7 people of working age for every person 65 and over, compared to 5 people of working age today for every person 65 and over.
- Today's older workers intend to retire later, at around 64 years for men and 62 years for women, compared to 58 years for men and 47 years for women in 2007.
- Increasing the participation of mature age workers by 5% in the next 40 years would increase real GDP per capita by 2.4%<sup>2</sup>.

To address the shortfalls created by retirement of our aging workforce and the new jobs created in the economy calls for a radical rethink in human resource strategies. Future competitiveness is likely to rest substantially on the performance and productivity of Australia's workforce and on the more effective use of its potential workforce.

Although part of the answer comes from migration, the supply of overseas labour to meet our domestic skills needs is by no means assured. Australia faces increasing competition from other economies seeking skilled migrants.

Also, the economic growth of emerging economies which are often the source countries for skilled migrants will encourage more nationals to remain in their home country.

<sup>1</sup>National Seniors Australia Barriers to Labour force Participation: Interim Recommendations - Facilitating the Labour Force Participation of Older Australians" August 2011

<sup>2</sup>Intergenerational Report 2010



## Where is this untapped potential?



With only 65% of Australia's working age population seen as being in the labour force (see definitions) this leaves considerable untapped potential for building the nation's wealth and meeting the skills and labour needs of the nation's businesses. Skilled labour does not grow on trees. Essentially Australia can only get labour from two sources. We can either import from overseas or we make full use of the existing potential workforce.

But with 35% of our working age population not in the workforce, we have an enormous, untapped resource, a reservoir of literally millions of people who are capable of both skilled and unskilled labour. Several attempts have been made to reach this resource, with varying degrees of success, but with the pressure building—as Australia's population continues to age—the need to access this resource steadily increases. We simply cannot afford to ignore it.

The 35% of the population that is not currently in the workforce is made up of groups such as stay at home parents, people with disabilities, early retirees and other disengaged people. Many of these people have the capacity to find and keep a job and make a valuable contribution to the nation's wealth if they are given the support and opportunity required to make the transition into work. Not included in the 35% of non-participants, but still an important source of future labour, is the 630,000 unemployed Australians who represent some 5.3% of Australia's twelve million strong labour force.

Although Australia's workforce participation rate increased from 61.3 per cent in 1980 to 65.2 per cent in 2012, it still compares unfavourably with other prominent OECD countries<sup>3</sup>.

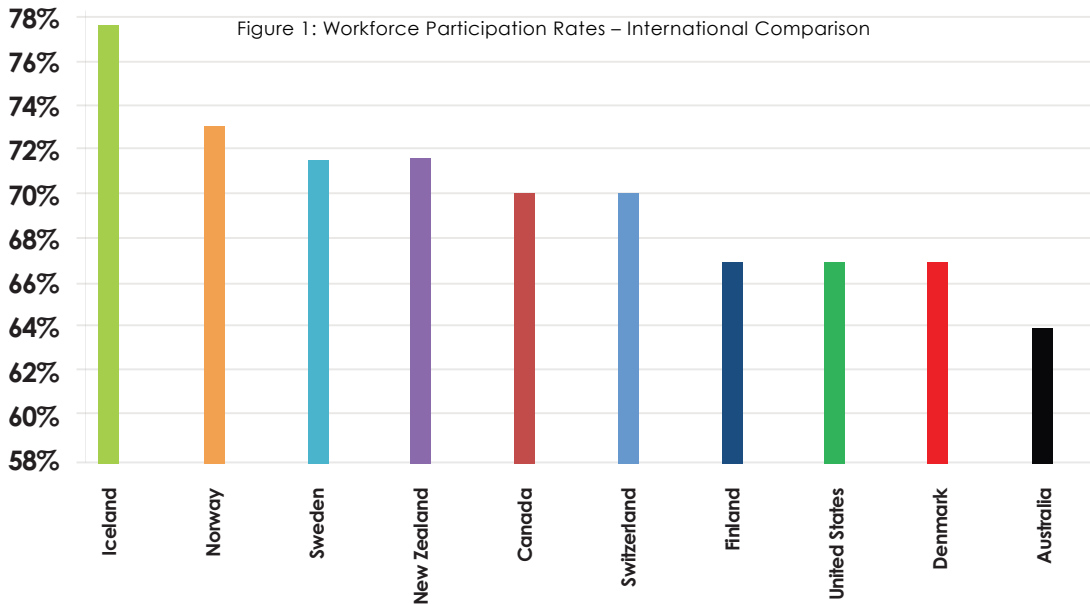
### Definitions

- **Labour force** Persons who were employed or unemployed.
- **Participation rate** The labour force expressed as a percentage of the civilian population aged 15 years and over.
- **Employed** All persons aged 15 years and over who worked or were away from work during the data period.
- **Unemployed** Persons aged 15 years and over who were not employed during the reference week, and had looked for work or were waiting to commence work.
- **Underemployed workers** Employed persons aged 15 years and over who want, and are available for, more hours of work than they currently have.

<sup>3</sup>Productivity Commission, 2007; Workforce Participation Rates - How Does Australia Compare?

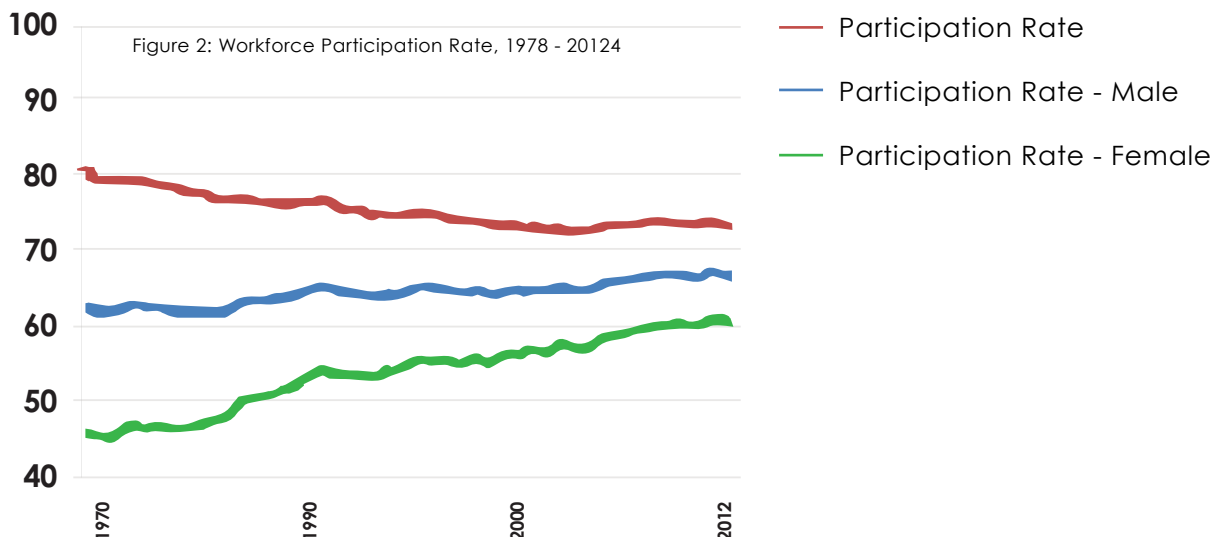


# Where is this untapped potential?



Also, the rise in the participation rate, masks divergent trends between participation rates for males and females. The participation rate of males declined over the last 30 years from 78.3% in 1980 to 71.9% in 2012, while the female participation rate increased from 43.5% in 1980 to 58.7% in 2012 as more women entered the workforce. Figure 2 highlights the recent trend of declining male participation rates against the growth in female participation rates.

Projections from the 2010 Intergenerational Report, estimate Australia's participation rate will fall from 65.1 % in 2010 to 63.9% in 2025 largely because of the exit of mature aged employees from the labour market. If Australia is to remain a prosperous nation, we must secure our workforce so that we can maintain our standard of living and continue our economic growth.



<sup>4</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, Australia, Nov 2011



# Outside the Box



Figure 3: The Workforce Participation Box



The potential for growth in employment participation has a broad base. There are many groups of people that are underrepresented in the working population and as such present opportunities for businesses seeking to diversify their workforce and *Employ Outside the Box*. People not participating come from all backgrounds and across all regions of Australia, and the key groups include:

## People with Disabilities

There is currently in excess of 800 000 Australians on the Disability Support Pension with only 8.5% of those reporting earning outside the DSP. Additionally, 40% of new DSP recipients moved from Newstart unemployment benefits onto the DSP. In the 2010-2011 year there were 91 000 new DSP recipients, while only 58 000 stopped receiving the DSP, of whom 62% transferred to the aged pension.





## Outside the Box



### Mature Aged Workers

People aged 45 and over will need to provide 85% of workforce growth in the next decade in order to meet the labour demands of employers<sup>5</sup>.

### Indigenous Australians

In 2010, there were an estimated 166,100 Indigenous people aged 15 years and over who were employed. This represented 46% of the Indigenous population of working age. Additionally, underemployment for Indigenous Australians remains consistently higher (18%) than the non-Indigenous population (12.6%)<sup>6</sup>. Indigenous Australian remain an underutilised source of labour, especially in regional and remote areas.

### Long term unemployed and underemployed

There are currently some 630,000 unemployed<sup>7</sup> Australians. In addition, around 880,000 of the employed labour force are seeking more hours or want more work.

### Women returning to work

Estimates show that Australia could increase its GDP by 13% or \$180 billion if it closed the gap between male and female participation rates<sup>8</sup>. While the participation rate for women has increased significantly since the 1980's, it still lags well behind that for men and we currently sit at 18th amongst the OECD nations.

### Men not at work

Of the 8 million Australian males in the adult male civilian population, at any one time over 2.2 million or nearly 30 per cent were outside the labour force - neither working nor looking for work<sup>9</sup>. These may be men who have taken redundancy or early retirement, be carers, have been injured or ill or working in the "grey economy" doing cash jobs.

### Unemployed youth

Between 2008 and 2011 the rate of non-participation among teenagers who were not in full-time education rose from 12.2% to 18.5%, the highest level since the recession in the early 1990's<sup>10</sup>. The number of 20 to 24-year-olds not engaged in full-time work or full-time education also rose considerably, to around 25 per cent, reversing the downward trend of the previous decade. Previous economic downturns have shown that it takes up to a decade for youth unemployment to drop back to pre-downturn levels<sup>11</sup>.

### Workers with different industry backgrounds

The Australian economy is undergoing significant structural adjustment which is resulting in the need for some workers to look for new career opportunities outside the industry within which they have honed their skills. Businesses seeking workers are encouraged to look beyond the lack of experience in their own industry, and to the skills that these people can bring to the business.

<sup>5</sup>VECCI, 2009, Grey matters

<sup>6</sup>ABS 2010, Labour Force Characteristics of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, Estimates from the Labour Force Survey, 2010

<sup>7</sup>Australian Bureau of Statistics, Labour Force, Australia, Nov 2011

<sup>8</sup>Goldman-Sachs Economic Research, Weekly comment: Productivity, Much ado about nothing, 26 August 2011.

<sup>9</sup>Productivity Commission 2008, Men Not at Work: An Analysis of Men Outside the Labour Force

<sup>10</sup>ABS 2011, Labour Force, Australia, Nov 2011

<sup>11</sup>OECD, 2011, Rising Youth Unemployment During the Crisis



# Economic Benefits from Increased Participation



Increasing the hiring and retention of people from those who are unemployed or currently not participating offers considerable benefits to businesses and the economy. Business has a leading role, in conjunction with government and the broader community, in driving the policy agenda and developing new strategies to address the issue of lifting workforce participation rates.

Cyclical pressures on the labour market create fluctuations in the supply of labour over time, but in the longer term, Australia will need to maximise the number of people in the workforce to keep pace with an economy set to continue expanding into the foreseeable future. This workforce will have to be smarter and better skilled to cope with changes in operating environments, competitive pressures and economic circumstances.

If Australia as a society is to continue to maintain its relative standard of living then the productive capacity of the labour market must rise at least in concert with those of our trade competitors.

ACCI does not suggest that business should engage people **at the expense** of their capacity to compete in the marketplace, rather that businesses can improve their assurance of long term labour supply and benefit their own businesses by providing sustainable employment opportunities for those currently outside the workforce.

## Benefits for:

- Individuals such as increased financial independence, greater confidence, improved health and increased community awareness; and,
- For the nation in reduced reliance on welfare, improved community health and higher tax earnings

Are enormously important but do not immediately translate to increased sales or greater productivity for a business owner.



# Benefits to Employers of diversifying their employment base



The ACCI Survey of Investor Confidence has consistently listed the Availability of Suitably Qualified Employees in the top five most pressing constraints on business investment despite an otherwise gloomy economic outlook. Accessing skilled employees, even during the Global Financial Crisis, has been a major issue for many employers and in some cases, can have a significant impact on a business's ability to grow. While the benefits of engagement in work for the individual and for the nation more broadly are well documented, the benefits to the business are less so. Although being a good corporate citizen is a noble aim, ultimately the effectiveness of plans to increase workforce participation require businesses to see an **economic** benefit of adopting diverse employment practices. There has to be a positive business case.

*Employ Outside the Box* is about better understanding the very real and tangible benefits to business of employing people currently outside the labour force. These include:

- **Creating a competitive advantage** - Research has shown that for businesses seeking a competitive advantage, focusing on diversity is an effective way to become product or service innovators. Businesses that mirror the community are part of the community.
- **Securing your future workforce** – the future labour market is likely to be characterised by considerable competition between employers seeking workers rather than the competition for workers seeking jobs, diverse employment practices can help overcome skills and labour shortages in a tight employment market.
- **Being an Employer of Choice** - Diversifying your employment base can help the business be seen as an employer of choice, a company that people WANT to work for. There are also awards and recognition schemes that recognise employers' commitment to diversity.
- **Building employee loyalty** – Employees who feel they have been given an opportunity by an open-minded employer usually respond with enthusiastic and loyal service.
- **Growing the skills of your current workforce** – Diversifying your employment base can open opportunities for existing workers to upskill into higher level positions or to act as trainers and mentors for new employees or contractors.
- **Taking advantages of Government incentives** – financial incentives, training support and workplace modification support are the types of government support provided for employing some disadvantaged job seekers.
- **Employing locally leads to longevity** - regional and remote areas benefit from increasing their workforce base through employing locals who are far more likely to stay in the region. This is a particularly strong business benefit for businesses employing a local indigenous workforce.
- **Meeting legal obligations and managing risks** - All employers and service providers are obliged to comply with national and state anti-discrimination legislation. You are less likely to receive a complaint of discrimination if you take active steps to comply with anti-discrimination legislation and Substantive Equality principles.



## Benefits to Employers of diversifying their employment base

Some employers have previously expressed concerns about perceived risks of employing people outside the labour force, including workplace safety issues, the new employee not fitting in to the workplace culture and the cost to changing existing infrastructure.

However, there is strong evidence to refute these perceptions. For example, people with disability have a lower number of occupational health and safety incidents compared with employees without disability. Workers' compensation costs are also lower for people with disability compared with other employees. Research conducted by Telstra into call centre staffing found that over a 15-month period, people with disability had 11.8 days absent, compared to people without disability who had 19.24 days absent. Changes to the workplace to allow better access for employees often also translates to better access for clients and customers, there is also government funding available that can contribute to the cost of modifications.

## What can governments do to help?

Employers alone should not shoulder the entire burden of lifting workforce participation. Access to training, government support and incentives should continue to be available to support businesses looking to diversify their employment base. ACCI believes that a medium to long term (4 -5 five year) strategy, starting with a clear action plan, is needed to promote engagement of those outside the box. Past experience has shown that short term projects and initiatives show some success during their operation but rarely continue beyond the initial funding period, resulting in lost momentum, lost initiative and lost talent.

Most importantly, ACCI considers that a broader strategy for promoting engagement and participation is needed. There have been fragmented approaches to promoting employment for those outside the workforce based on the various categories of equity groups. A single comprehensive strategy should be developed to promote increased participation involving:

- Targeted industry campaigns;
- Broad communications to employers and the community; and
- Welfare reforms and enhanced mutual obligation requirements.

<sup>12</sup>Australian Safety and Compensation Council 2007, 'Are people with disability at risk at work?'.  
<sup>13</sup>Noble, J. (1999) Entrepreneurial Research Project, Telstra Australia.



## Increasing participation need not be at the expense of skills



ACCI supports participation policies that enable all Australians to be competitive in the employment market. This means providing people with marketable skills and delivering a training system that keeps pace with the skill needs of business. Government policies must foster a commitment to work and life-long learning for all those capable of participating in employment.

More effort is required to ensure those groups outside the box have the skills they need to be competitive in the labour market. For example, latest figures show that people with a disability represent some 18.5% of the population yet only 5.9% of total Vocational Education and Training (VET) enrolments of students in 2005 identified themselves as having a disability. In addition to the low numbers of people with a disability engaging with VET, of the 97,000 people with a disability who undertook a VET qualification on 2009, only 16,000 registered a completion; and of those, only 56% recorded an employment outcome.

A national strategy to increase participation must include a strong skilling component to ensure that those people outside the box have skills that will enable them to be competitive in the labour market. This is particularly important for those people moving from one industry to another during their working life as part of structural adjustment occurring in the economy.

## Language, Literacy and Numeracy

According to research by the OECD, basic education and training contribute to better public health, lower crime, the environment, parenting, political and community participation, and social cohesion. The same research indicates that a 1% rise in average literacy across a nation's population will lead to a 1.5% increase in GDP per capita and a 2.5% rise in labour productivity.

The 2006 Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey (ALLS) shows that approximately 7 million or 46% of Australians aged 15 to 74 years lack the prose literacy skills and approximately 7.9 million (or 53%) lack the basic numeracy skills to function effectively in the workforce and in everyday situations.

Basic levels of language, literacy and numeracy underpin the ability of an individual to progress into further education and training.



## Vocational Education and Training

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For those outside the box, developing occupationally specific vocational skills is, in many cases, an essential step in gaining employment. ACCI believes that the focus of VET for non-participants in the workforce should be on basic vocational skills development in entry level qualifications, such as Certificate 1, 2 & 3, and skills sets linked to real job outcomes.

Further, training (and government support for training) should be focussed on occupational areas that are likely to lead to sustainable job outcomes. This would involve individuals undertaking training for jobs that are in demand in their region, and are likely to be in demand in the future. Past experience has shown that supply driven approaches, such as those where government or training providers dictate what offerings are made to individuals increase the likelihood of a mismatch between the skills needs of employers and the skills of the individual upon the completion of training. This can cause the individual to question the value of skills development, as past experience has not achieved real outcomes and for employers to lose faith in a training system that does not deliver the skills they need.

Essential to developing work ready skills for those outside the box is the need for training to contain strong component of work based learning. Many individuals outside the box may have little or no contemporary work experience. It is essential that these people gain some exposure to a current work environment in their training, either real or simulated, to prepare them adequately for the world of work. Exposure to a real work environment also helps to contextualise and confirm the skills they have learnt so that they have an understanding of how those skills are used on the job.



## Employability skills



In the modern business environment of productivity and efficiency, workers are required to perform many different tasks and be able to understand the holistic goals of the organisation. They must be adaptable to change, able to fit into many differing roles across the scope of the organisation and be able to adapt to new technology and work practices quickly.

Employability skills are the essential ingredient for employees to have the adaptability and personal attributes to fit this new model for the workforce. For those outside the box, employability skills represent the skills that they need to gain employment or establish an enterprise, but also to progress within an enterprise or expand employment capability, so as to achieve their potential in the workforce.

Key skills, which describe the learning capacity of an individual under the Employability Skills Framework, include:

- **Communication** skills that contribute to productive and harmonious relations between employees and customers;
- **Team work** skills that contribute to productive working relationships and outcomes;
- **Problem-solving** skills that contribute to productive outcomes;
- **Initiative and enterprise** skills that contribute to innovative outcomes;
- **Planning and organising** skills that contribute to long-term and short-term strategic planning;
- **Self-management** skills that contribute to employee satisfaction and growth;
- **Learning skills** that contribute to ongoing improvement and expansion in employee and company operations and outcomes; and
- **Technology skills** that contribute to effective execution of tasks.



## Careers advice



For those outside the box, career development is important to give them an understanding of the jobs that are available and the training that can help prepare them for work. Career development advice, providing accurate, complete and current information about occupations and industries assists individuals in making informed choice about their future employment path and sets them on the road to developing the skills necessary to gain employment.

There should be more opportunities for industry-provided career advice and reforms that link students with direct business and industry information not just websites that indicate general information or individuals without an understanding of the broader skills and labour needs of business. Without an industry perspective on this information, individuals may make decisions without being fully informed about that industry and may form unrealistic expectations about the type of work they will be doing.

In April 2014, ACCI released a major policy document entitled Learning to Work which identified five key strategies to address the concerning increase in unemployment for young Australians. Career development, where young people can be well informed and guided towards industries and regions where the jobs are, featured strongly as one of the five strategies.

### Learning to work – a helping hand for young Australians



Industry Career development

Work ready graduates

Apprenticeships and  
traineeships

Employer-facing employment  
services

Workplace regulations





## Employment Service Providers

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ACCI stresses the importance of involving employers in developing strategies that will ultimately lead to sustainable employment outcomes for those outside the box. Employment Services (ES) and Disability Employment Services (DES) providers need to work with employers to ensure that jobseekers have both the required skills and a work ready attitude to ensure a smooth transition.

Communication between ES/DES providers and employers could benefit from the involvement of intermediaries (such as business and industry associations where appropriate). The concept of “Employers as clients” for ES and DES requires greater focus. In particular, ways in which small and medium employers can be supported to establish employment opportunities for unemployed persons is needed. The work of individual ES/DES providers should tie into overall government, industry, regional and local strategies. Employer engagement should be central to this approach.

Services provided by ES and DES should be mainstream to employer options for filling job vacancies. The use of ES by employers has fallen to as low of 5% of recruitment. These job services should be part of the general job market, not just a service for the disadvantaged and disengaged. Employers and job seekers alike need to see it not as a welfare offering, but a legitimate part of the job market.

Industry feedback suggests that some ES providers do not have sufficient specialist industry knowledge to make a satisfactory placement, so opportunities for real employment outcomes in industry are lost. Stronger engagement between employers and ES would lead to ES developing a stronger understanding of the needs of employers as well as employers developing an appreciation of the ES offerings to employers.



## Recommendations



ACCI has identified a number of other key recommendations aimed at promoting the employment of people currently outside, or marginally attached to, the workforce. ACCI recommends:

1. That business leaders across Australia take shared ownership of the employment participation issue and drive change within their own organisations as well as promoting the benefits of a diverse workforce more widely.
2. A national below the line marketing campaign aimed at employers to dispel the myths of employing people from disadvantaged groups as well as promoting the economic and business advantages of diverse employment practices.
3. A strong interface between employers and Employment Services Providers driven through industry associations to improve understanding and practices and to build confidence in providers.
4. Through data analysis, identify where there is a good fit between the jobs available and target groups.
5. Establish, in conjunction with peak business bodies, a "Corporate Champions" initiative and other awareness programs that actively promote employment of people from disadvantaged groups.
6. Streamline incentives to employers for employing people from disadvantaged groups. Establish one basic category for incentives funded from a single source agency that recognises the variety of disadvantaged groups and the challenges faced by employers in offering employment to them.
7. Increase Mutual Obligation requirements and introduce compulsory participation requirements in employment related activities across all streams such as Work for the Dole and training activities for people receiving payments deemed capable of working in order to boost their skills and employability.
8. Increase access to skills development, employability skills and vocationally specific Language, Literacy and Numeracy for people currently outside the workforce.
9. Provide VET courses for those outside the workforce in areas of employer demand at appropriate entry levels of Certificate I, II and III and skills sets including a strong component of work experience in a real employment environment linked to occupational outcomes.
10. Provide industry driven careers advice to those outside the workforce to assist them in making informed choices regarding training and employment prospects.

## CAMPBELL PAGE

ACCI has partnered with Campbell Page to assist members and industry in creating direct links between industry needs and the workforce. For more information contact ACCI on **03 9668 9950**.



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