

# Customised Employment Project Summary

May 2024



This project summary is a condensed view of the full project scope with the intent to present a sharper view of Customised Employment from a practical perspective.



## **Project Objective 1:** Define a model/s of Customised Employment (CE) within the Australian disability employment context

### **Project Intent:**

Provide a definition for service providers looking to adopt a CE approach and clarity of expectation for participants seeking a provider delivering a CE approach.

### **Project Outcome – CE Definition:**

Customised Employment is an individualised, strength based service practice strategy.

CE is generally adopted within the broader framework known as Competitive Integrated Employment (CIE). CIE is most readily understood as mainstream or ‘Open’ employment outcomes.

### **Project Outcome – CE Purpose:**

At the core an effective CE strategy requires a person-centred approach to gain and maintain a mainstream employment outcome.

### **Project Background Findings:**

The understanding and implementation of the CE model is underdeveloped in Australia. There is limited common understanding of what constitutes the provision of CE among stakeholders within the disability employment sector.

The report explores key components that define CE within the Australian Disability Employment context.

This summary provides a framework for service providers wanting to deliver a CE approach (referred to within stages 1-3) and for participants/families/representatives from the service model context (stage 3 and supporting CE service phase model checklist/framework).

### Summary of Project Recommendations:

CE should be recognised as an effective service practice strategy to gain and maintain mainstream employment outcomes for people with disability.

- The descriptor “Customised Employment” is adopted as the Australian benchmark, ensuring the universality of the definition.
- The principles, elements and phases which underpin the definition of CE are fully recognised and adopted into practice.
- An agreed and consistent evidence-based framework be adopted alongside the definition (incorporating a service model checklist).
- Rigorous data collection to support outcomes delivered and cost and time required of the approach.
- A series of controlled pilot grants be undertaken in a range of provider settings with a variety of participant cohorts to test the approach and produce peer reviewed evidence and supporting data (cost, time, outcomes).
- Workforce capability to be supported through development of a training and peer mentoring ecosystem. CE training may include aligned micro-credentialed activity as well as more comprehensive training.

**Note:** Due to the person-centred nature of the strategy, the spectrum of disability cohorts and individual capability and/or needs, flexibility is required within the service strategy phases.



## Underpinning definition of the CE strategy:

CE consists of values-based underlying principles. It involves alignment to key strategy elements and a set of phases, each with its own descriptor of good practice as outlined below:

### Stage One: Principles of Customised Employment

A person-centred practice strategy to gain and maintain mainstream employment outcomes.

- Values-based principles: Inclusivity, Disability Advocacy and a person-centred approach

### Stage Two: Elements of Customised Employment.

To move beyond the descriptor of CE the following key elements are to be adopted by service providers in their engagement with participants and employers:

- Community based employment
- Voluntary and mutually beneficial relationships
- Individualised job duties
- Tailored employment relationships
- Compliance with industrial regulations
- Representation and negotiation support
- Inclusive approach
- Support for self-employment
- Targeted support for vulnerable jobseekers

Service delivery strategies aligned to the elements include:

- Community-based meetings
- Rapport building
- Active listening
- Direct observation
- Interviews with stakeholders
- Community observation
- Business observations
- Informational interviews
- Job-related tasks
- Work experience
- Collaborative validation
- Customised job description
- Long-term support

## Stage Three: Phases of Customised Employment

CE is often only discussed by referring to the more practical aspects of service delivery. When delivering an effective CE approach, the following phases should be incorporated:

- Phase A: Participant Discovery
- Phase B: Informational Interviews (or Organisational Discovery)
- Phase C: Interviews for Job Design and Placement
- Phase D: Individualised Job Setup
- Phase E: On the Job Training and Ongoing Support



## Project Objective 2: Development of a data collection framework for evidence-based employment outcomes

The CE Project suggests a framework can be readily implemented encapsulating the definition, service principles, service elements and model phases outlined in the report in Project Objective 1: Defining Customised Employment.

The report provides the essential framework for a consistent application and possible assessment of the CE strategy within the Australian Disability employment context.

Currently, the broad and varied application of the term Customised Employment and the absence of any comprehensive data presents some serious challenges to objectively assessing the strategy and model's use and effectiveness in achieving CIE outcomes.

## Project next step recommendations:

To address the current gaps in genuine or substantial evidence and data collection, NDS recommends a series of funded, controlled CE projects be trialed and tested with a range of service providers under the framework to provide evidence of the time, cost and outcomes achieved.

To address the skills gap, a workforce capability strategy should be developed that would support the effective delivery of CE as defined (recognising the development of the Disability Employment Centre for Excellence). A CE micro-credential program, along with more comprehensive training and structured mentoring should be developed and adopted as an initial step to building stronger workforce capability. This would assist accessibility in a more cost-effective manner to expedite implementation of CE strategy and practice.

The proposed framework phases and aligned checklist be seen as a key step for providers looking to deliver CE and for participants seeking a provider of CE in the Australian disability employment context.

NDS, with its demonstrated capacity and broad sector support is in a strong position to support further work to progress a consistent application of the CE strategy.

With support funding NDS could engage and/or partner with academic support, RTO's, providers and participants in order to progress this work.

With support funding NDS could undertake further international study into both content and qualification levels. This work would also align with the intent of the proposed Disability Employment Centre of Excellence.

**# The NDS summary is taken from the full CE project report which was commissioned by NDS and undertaken by Peter Symonds Consulting May 2024.**

## NDS CE Service model framework – a checklist guide to CE service model phases

It is important to note these service model phases are being delivered in alignment to the CE strategy principles, values and key elements as outlined by NDS and with further information outlined in detail within the full CE Report.

Also noting the phases are not linear, are subject to individual participant needs and changing circumstances and are to be considered within the practical realms of workplace considerations, service funding scope and parameters.

If these phases are being delivered and adhered to it is reasonable to suggest that a consistent CE approach has been adopted in line with the NDS definition and within the CE strategy objective of gaining and maintaining a mainstream employment outcome.

It is also important to underpin the need for workforce capability. It is expected that service delivery organisations and operational delivery staff to have undertaken appropriate CE training in line with the scope of the full CE strategy.

| CE MODEL | CE PHASE   | PRACTICAL PHASE DELIVERY DESCRIPTION  |
|----------|--|---|
| Phase A  | Participant Discovery                                  | <p>Involves community-based information gathering about the participant through a self- determined process that includes support networks, identifying vocational interests, talents and skills and how these could be applied in a work context. Employment pathways, matching interests and skill sets of the participant are investigated and recorded and vocational themes are identified.</p> <p>Discovery is not a pass-fail assessment.</p>   |
| Phase B  | Informational Interviews (or Organisational Discovery) | <p>Includes interviews of employers, gathering information about the skills required in potential workplaces, availability of work experience or job opportunities, gaining insight into workplace cultures and determining if the participant needs any further specific skill development to be job ready. Always includes situational workplace visits to explore and discover.</p>  |
| Phase C  | Interviews for Job Design and Placement                | <p>Involves investigating and developing a customised job that matches the interests, skills and abilities of the jobseeker with the needs and nature of the employer.</p>  |
| Phase D  | Individualised Job Setup/ Customising a job            | <p>A job co-design process between the employer, service provider and participant that incorporates the employee’s skills and abilities, held before the participant commences work that will ensure the sustainability of employment. Breakdown of role tasks, task design and agreed expectations are completed to define benchmarks to be trained against.</p> <p>Identification and engagement of natural workplace supports is assisted through individualised support mechanisms suited to the participant. Identification of risk and risk mitigation to ensure a safe workplace environment, implementation of work adjustment and work modifications is completed and agreed to by all parties prior to job start.</p> |



|                       |  |  |
|-----------------------|--|--|
| <p><b>Phase E</b></p> | <p>On the Job Training and Ongoing Support (workplace inclusion, integration and career development)</p> | <p>Provision of on-the-job/in employment support as required, for the employee, in collaboration with the employer. Effective induction and workplace integration is completed. One to one support might be needed using systematic instruction to learn job task requirements and/or to establish the processes and practices required for the job and to meet role expectations. Providers should build natural peer supports both in the workplace and external to it, ensuring the employer can access assistance where required.</p> <p>Should involve regular on-the-job reviews to ensure role progress and development and address any identified challenges. Employment supports are mutually agreed, noting intensity/need may vary at times and are in place for as long as required. Supports are intended to build independence but to ensure sustainability.</p> |
|-----------------------|--|--|

# This checklist guide has been developed by NDS from concepts identified in a range of sources noted in the report and broader dialog.

