Policy that works:   
A fair go for disability employment post-COVID-19

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# Introduction

Workbridge has prepared this policy paper that looks at helping more disabled people to get into work and to make it easier for them. It is meant to add to the public discussion during a time when we need to think in big ways to make things happen.

We are very happy to see more money in the Budget to help disabled people find a job. We know that COVID-19 will affect disabled people in a very big way compared to other people.

This difficult time means we can make a big change to help disabled people. We can change public policy. We must take this chance to change.

Workbridge was founded in 1931. It has always been a top leader in helping disabled people find employment. Over time, we have shown that we want changes to the way decisions about disabled people are made. Disabled people should be part of the decision making.

We work with many people who have a wide range of impairments and health conditions. This means we can help and give advice to services who employ disabled people. Our Constitution makes sure that Workbridge is led by a team of people who are mostly part of the disabled persons’ organisation (DPO). There are also employers and service providers on our Council.

Our strong kaupapa (policy/mission) to be disability-driven means we are the best people to work with the Government to change things.

There are many news ideas in this paper that we want to put into action. We will do this with or without the Government helping us.

We have written this policy paper after talking with many sectors. The ideas in this paper are ours. We speak only for Workbridge. We want to provide the services that we have ideas about. We also hope that other companies look at giving help in a similar way and add to the conversation.

# Executive Summary

## We recommend that:

1. The Government should give Workbridge both money and practical support. Workbridge wants to offer career counselling that is focused on people with disabilities. This includes disabled high school students having a mentor and helping them through changes as they leave school.
2. Clear and simple guidelines that are easy to understand are created. This means places of further study are responsible for how disabled learners are treated and included wherever they study.
3. The Fees Free scheme should fund any disabled student who wants to complete studies at a higher level.
4. The Government acts on the worries of wider community about the ways that benefits work. The abatement rates and stand-down periods means some disabled people may not want to say yes to job offers.
5. The Government makes sure they ask as many people and agencies as possible before they look at bringing in payments for disabled people that are not income-tested. This would mean that a disabled person’s money for everyday living is not less than before because they are disabled.
6. The Government would stop there being a difference in help that is available. Now, people with health conditions and disabilities they’ve had from birth are not able to have funded treatment from ACC. This should change.
7. Right now there are many people who do not have a job. There are also fewer options for ways to earn money. We want the Government and other companies who give people jobs to understand the value of volunteering. Volunteering helps people looking for jobs, helps organisations, and helps the country.
8. There should be a way to give all disabled people an amount of money. This money will mean disabled people of all ages and all types of employment can be an active part of society. The money should also mean that people can afford a connection to the internet. When people don’t have a connection to the internet it is harder for them to get a job. Technology can help prepare people for a job and some of this technology can be more expensive.
9. The Government should give Workbridge both money and practical support. Workbridge wants to train and help disabled people who want to be self-employed. There should be a mentor who has a successful business. It would be even better if this mentor is also disabled.
10. The Government should accept that disabled people do not get enough jobs. They should not limit what a disabled person can do in a job. They should work with the companies that give disabled people jobs to make sure the disabled person feels they are doing well.
11. Disabled people should be able to help design the job they do. We should see them as a whole person who would like a career, not just a job.
12. The Government and NGOs should work together. Many disabled people have lots of problems in their way when looking for work. They need to do more to help people who find it difficult to get a job.
13. The Government, businesses, DPOs and Workbridge need to work closely together. They need to make an education campaign. It needs to tell people all the good things about employing disabled people. It needs to make sure that people understand that what they might believe about disabled people isn’t true. There should be adverts in the papers, in the streets, and online. There should also be workshops.
14. The country should be talking about whether we should give money to employers if they hire disabled workers.
15. The Government and other companies that help disabled people should openly say how many disabled people they employ. They should also say how many disabled people are in management.
16. The Government should encourage companies to hire disabled people. They should show that they prefer to deal with disability service providers who employ disabled people in leadership roles.

The reasons that we recommend these things is explained in the rest of this document.

# Setting the scene

New Zealand is looking to restart the economy in the best way possible. But we cannot go back to the way things were before lockdown straight away.

In the 2020 Budget, Treasury has said there will be a lot of people without jobs and it will happen quickly. Even though the Government is doing a lot to help, we do not know exactly what will happen. This means that there might be many people without jobs for a long time.

Before COVID-19, the economy was good, and many people had jobs. But even then, people pointed out that disabled people needed more help from Government policies.

In 2018 the Human Rights Commission wrote a Tracking Equality Report. They found that disabled people had the worst time looking for jobs in New Zealand. Disabled women had an even worse time.

In June 2019, Statistics New Zealand made a report. Only 23.4% of disabled people had jobs and 69.9% of non-disabled people had jobs.

This paper looks at problems disabled people come across during their life. It looks at problems in high school. It looks at them trying to get ahead. It looks at them trying to make a good career. Disabled people need support all the way through their career plans. There is not enough money to help support them in this way.

Workbridge has contracts with the Ministry of Social Development (MSD). Right now, it is a fee-for-service outcomes-based model. This makes it difficult to have a long-term relationship with a disabled person. It makes it hard for them to have a career.

The contract works when there is a good level of employment in general – when employers want to hire people and there aren’t many people to hire. When there aren’t many people to hire, the employers think there is less risk to them. They generally do not have good disability knowledge or confidence in disabled people.

The economy is not looking good right now. There are many people without jobs. There are not as many places hiring people either. This means that it is easier to give jobs to people without a disability. Without new ideas from Workbridge and the Government, it may be harder for disabled people to find jobs for a while.

Disabled people looking for jobs have a lot more trouble because they do not always have access to digital learning. They do not have the tools or training to help them get more skilled. Many disabled people are actually very skilled in other ways – critical thinking, problem solving and the ability to listen.

We are worried about the economy and what it means for disabled jobseekers. But we want to fix these problems and have hope that thigs will change. With every challenge comes opportunity. Workbridge and the Government needs to work together. We want to support people into jobs in the best way for right now. We hope that there are more chances for disabled people. We hope that New Zealand will lead the world in how disabled people find jobs.

Businesses had to change the way they work because of COVID. Many more now see that working from home is a good option. This means offices in town are not always needed. There is a lot of hope for disabled people. It helps that they can work in a flexible way.

The ideas in this paper come from this place of hope. The ideas are also about social justice and disabled people having their say. Having a job is key. A job means mana and independence – money and social. New Zealand must decide that we will not ignore or not make use of some of our most important resources, our people.

If we employed more disabled people, New Zealand would earn more money from tax.

# Tearing down the silos

New Zealand must be an accessible, inclusive society. Every Government department must make sure it meets the needs of disabled people.

We have talked to some Government departments. We are happy to hear that they want to work together for the good of disabled people. Before, some Government departments have not been working together. Some disabled people have not been able to get jobs. Workbridge ideas that have been very good in trials have not been given money because the departments do not work together.

The State Sector Act changed last year to help departments work together on policy. While we look at changing things further, it is very important that departments keep doing this.

The Government must accept that the best people to make policy that affects the employment disabled people are the people who are disabled.

# High school, high expectations

Workbridge is incredibly happy to see money from Budget 2020 given to cover students in the last two years of high school. We have wanted this for many years. Now it will be important to make sure the funding is used well.

Employment is something that usually begins in high school when students start looking at their futures. Without clear help, many disabled teens may think that their futures look bad.

Being a teenager can be very difficult. It can be even more difficult for teenagers with a disability. Disabled people are often made to feel different and like they don’t fit in. This can mean they are not invited to social activities. They may have low self-esteem.

Disabled teenagers may not be able to learn to drive.

High school students talk with career counsellors about jobs. But the counsellor may not know what people with a similar disability can do. They may not know about programmes and technology that can help. This can lead to low expectations being re-enforced by an "expert".

It is very important for disabled teenagers to have a mentor who is also disabled. Teenagers will be encouraged if they can meet adults with the same or similar impairment to them who are doing well in the career that interests them.

One of the biggest issues facing disabled jobseekers is low expectations. We must help to change this. If we change this, everything else can change above it. As Henry Ford famously said, "whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you're right".

Workbridge is the best organisation to run a career counselling and mentoring programme for disabled high school students. We are disability-driven. We are a pan-disability provider of employment services.

The best people to visit schools should be those who are disabled themselves. It would be hugely helpful for teenagers to have adult mentors who they can see doing well.

The programme would allow practice interviews with employers. Disabled students will learn about the qualities and qualifications an employer is looking for in each career.

Disabled students would be mentored by adult role models. They will be the right people to give advice about how they succeeded in roles that are of interest to the jobseeker.

If they have different goals and want to work in a trade, we will help them find a placement. This is like the Gateway programme. It will help a jobseeker and an employer have a relationship. This may end with them having a job in the long term.

We tested a new programme: Workbridge In Schools. This placed some disabled people into meaningful work. These people might have spent their working life on the Supported Living Payment.

But we didn’t get funding for this programme.

We would like this programme to work like this:

* it would be easy to go from high school into a job
* they would learn how to properly work in the job
* their quality of life would get better
* they would be part of the economy.

It is very important that we help disabled people who want to work as an apprentice. We want to give them as much help as possible.

## We recommend that:

1. The Government should give Workbridge both money and practical support. Workbridge wants to offer career counselling that is focused on people with disabilities. This includes disabled high school students having a mentor and helping them through changes as they leave school.

# Tertiary study

Thank you to the Tertiary Education Commission. They have worked with us and helped us to talk to other Government departments. They have been very positive. They see the value that we have. We think others in the State Sector should be the same.

Disabled people need as much help as we can give them. We want the best chance of success in finding a job. A university degree might help. Only 12% of disabled people – 25% of nondisabled people – go to university.

Getting a university education should be an inclusive, accessible experience.

Both students and Workbridge have wondered who should give the money to support people with technology. The most important thing is for lots of help to be given and for it to be given quickly. Workbridge believes that universities should take responsibility for this. They should support disabled students fully. In society, disabled people are thought to be a problem for someone else.

Not many disabled people go to university of have a job. We believe the Fees Free scheme should pay for a disabled person’s full course of study. Training Support funds cannot presently be used to fund course fees. Many disabled people do not feel good about their chances of employment, even if they do further study. This means they are less likely to do further study. We need to think in the long-term. If we pay for their studies, they will likely be more independent in the future.

There are many things that help disabled people do well at university. These things should always happen. They should be looked at closely.

* Disabled people must be able to get around everywhere on campus.
* Public computers must have as much helpful technology as possible. This will help disabled students be more successful.
* Help from another person to read, take notes, or help with other tasks must always be available.
* Technology that helps a disabled person must be fully paid for (and quickly).
* Disabled people must be able to meet with people who understand what they need. These people must be able to tell them about the best technology for them.
* Disabled people must be given very good training to use the technology. They must have support to learn how to use technology.

Workbridge works well with a lot of universities. We also have very good links to employers in New Zealand. We can use all these links to make it easier for disabled people to get jobs. Disabled people will be able to learn on the job with an internship. This will give them good experience. They will grow their social groups. They will have more confidence.

The Australian Network on Disability did a survey in 2018. The survey was to check how well the internship programme worked. They found that 80% of people who did an internship got a job within four months.

## We recommend that:

1. Very clear and direct guidelines are created at universities. Universities will need to make sure disabled people are included in all ways.
2. The Fees Free scheme is extended. There should be enough money given to any disabled student who wants to study at a higher level.

# The Benefit trap

It is very difficult to get a first job. Employers want someone with experience. But it is very hard to get experience. This is worse when many people can’t find a job. It is even worse for a disabled person.

It looks like the way employment contracts work now is to get people off benefits. But many people volunteer and make a difference. They think that benefits and full-time employment should not go together.

There is a problem with the benefit rates and stand-down time outside of people with disabilities. But it’s important to ask questions about this. Being disabled often costs a lot of money.

* Houses close to buses and trains, shops and cafes, are more expensive because they are close to these. If you live further away, it is harder to be find a job or take part in social activities.
* The things that help disabled people every day can take up a lot of space. This means they need a bigger house than other people.
* Things that help disabled people every day cost more.
* Many disabled people can’t find jobs. Many disabled people can’t find good jobs. This means they don’t earn as much money.

It can be very difficult for someone who becomes disabled in their working years. They may have many big problems to get back to work. The help they get depends on how they became disabled. If it was an accident, they will be given more help.

The people who made ACC thought that this should be looked at.

There is a strong idea that not giving money to disabled people is unfair and wrong. We think money should be given to help pay for being disabled.

The way the benefit works now means it is harder for disabled people. They may not want to say yes to a part-time job. And a part-time job might lead to a full-time job.

The way the benefit works may also mean disabled people don’t want to think about setting up their own business. This would suit disabled people who need to work when they can or can’t work full-time. Small businesses give good options for employment.

## We recommend that:

1. The Government looks at the worries people have about the way benefits work. They should look at why it’s so hard for disabled people to say yes to jobs because of money.
2. The Government consults many people and companies. They should think about giving money to disabled people. This money should not be income-tested. A disabled person should have enough money to live and enjoy life.
3. The Government changes the rules about how much help is given. The same help should be given to someone who becomes disabled. The same help should be given to someone who is disabled from birth.

# Valuing volunteers

Not as many people volunteer as they used to. We must be careful that disabled people are not doing jobs for free when they should be paid. However, volunteering is an important part of New Zealand culture. It can help people meet each other. It can also make it more likely that you will get paid work.

Volunteering can help you learn more skills. If you have a project on the internet, you might be working in a team. This will give you skills that can help you find a job.

The Government should know that volunteering is important and valuable. Volunteering should be considered when looking at how someone works.

## We recommend that:

1. There are not many jobs now and it’s a hard time. The Government should see that volunteering is very good for jobseekers, companies, and the country.

# The technology trap

Many jobs today need people to use computers and know a lot about technology. Now we have technology that helps disabled people to use computers. This means there are more jobs that should be open to disabled people. But it is expensive and needs more training.

If you are disabled, technology means you can do a task you could not do before. If you can’t use your hands, you can’t type on a computer keyboard. But if you have a dictation programme like Dragon Naturally Speaking, you can use the computer. You might even be faster! But it’s hard to learn Dragon well. It takes a lot of effort and learning. You need a good memory to remember the commands.

We can see from the COVID-19 lockdown that disabled people had more problems if they didn’t have computers or technology to help them. People with technology coped much better. Those who didn’t found shopping more difficult. They also didn’t have social contact.

We must keep working. Disabled people who don’t have computers will find it life harder. They will also find it harder to get a job.

Many disabled people can’t afford computers. They also can’t afford the internet, other technology to help them, and software. This means they don’t have the same level of independence or opportunity. They are trapped. They can’t get Support Funds unless they have a job, but they can’t get a job because they don’t understand the technology.

If a disabled person gets a job, they can get Support Funds. They can buy some technology to help them with this money. But the support funds can’t be used to buy laptops and phones. Employers must buy computer hardware, so it is not the Government buying it. But it makes sense for the disabled person to have a computer at home to keep learning how to use it.

Example one. A blind person gets a job at a company. The staff use cheap Chromebook computers. These work very well for most staff. But the screen reading on a Chromebook is too simple. They can’t do their job properly. They could buy a MacBook. A MacBook is more expensive. The MacBook is very good and has the right software. They would be able to do the job. But Support Funds does not give them the money. This means it is more expensive to hire the blind person and they may not want to. This could mean the disabled person doesn’t get the job.

Example two. A person who wears hearing aids is offered a sales job. They must talk on the phone with people a lot. Sales staff are given cheap Android smartphones. But there is a problem with these phones and their hearing aids. The aids work well with the MFI (Made for iPhone) standard. An iPhone is three times the price of the other phones. But without one, the disabled person will find it very hard to do the job. Support Funds will not give them the money because there is a policy that it does not cover phones.

You could say that the employer should pay for the more expensive items. We would hope so. But it could also mean the disabled person doesn’t get the job because it costs too much.

The way it works now does not make it easy for disabled people to find work.

Disabled people find it confusing and difficult when there is no money to fund things they need. They do not feel supported by the government. They want to do well but they can’t.

A disabled student uses tools that they know well and can use easily. But they might need to give it back when they finish studying. But they still need the tools. They must apply again to get the same tools. This takes time and means they don’t have what they need. This needs to change.

It is all Government money. The way it works makes it hard for disabled people to do well.

We must change this now. It must be easier for disabled people to get money from the Government. The Government should pay for the equipment. Disabled people will be able to work and play. Disabled people must be fully involved in society, no matter what.

## We recommend that:

1. There are some parts of New Zealand that do not give money for certain things that disabled people need. We think money should be given so that disabled people can be a full part of society. This should happen even when they have a job. Money should be given to pay for technology that helps disabled people live a full life. The technology should be paid for when they start a new job.

# Self-employment

Many disabled people do not start their own business because it is too hard. Many employers do not want to give a job to disabled people because they do not understand them well. Disabled people could work for themselves. This would be good for people who have many issues. You can choose when to work. You can also choose how hard to work! Being self-employed works well for disabled people.

Many people now have meetings on the internet. New Zealand has excellent internet. New helpful technology means it is easier for disabled people to have meetings like this. Working from home is good for many reasons.

There are lots of people with great ideas who do not know how to get started. Disabled people mentoring other disabled people helps. They can give them good advice. With the Internet, that person could be anywhere in the world. We think that when a disabled person has a good business plan, the Government should give them money to help them start the business.

## We recommend that:

1. The Government should give money and other support to Workbridge. We want to help and train disabled people who want to work for themselves. They should be mentored by other disabled people who have done well in business.

# Underemployment

Many disabled people who want a job can’t get one because of the way people think about disabled people. Some disabled people take a job because they are desperate. But that job might not be very good. The disabled person might have more talents that they can’t use.

Workbridge wants to work with disabled people in the long-term. We want to be there for disabled people all the way through their journey. We want to help them and give advice. We want to support them and help them write their CVs. We think this will help change the way that disabled people in New Zealand are seen. But at the moment we cannot do this. The money we have is only used for a set ideas.

We really want to work with disabled people much more. Especially disabled people who are in work that is not using all their skills. We do not have enough money now. It is only enough for a few hours of help. A few hours means only simple help and advice. This is hard for us. We want to help more but we can’t. The Government does not give us enough money to fully help a disabled person.

The Government tells us we should give more time to people. But they do not pay us for this time. The Government thinks that we can run our business without enough money. We can’t.

Working without enough money means we cannot work with more people. We cannot help people who don’t have jobs. If we worked with more people, we would have more money for the business. If we had more money, we could help more people.

Disabled people with bad jobs might have to stay in that bad job. They might have to keep going without much help from us. They might leave the bad job and have no job to go to. This is a trap.

We want disabled people to do their best. They should be able to achieve more. They should be able to get better jobs. We want more disabled people to have good jobs with responsibility. We want other disabled people to see that it is possible. We want to change things.

A disabled person with a job will ask Workbridge to help them because they have a goal in mind. They want a better career and need help to get there. If Workbridge sees that the goal is good, we should help as much as we can.

## We recommend that:

1. The Government should accept that disabled people do not get enough jobs. They should not limit what a disabled person can do in a job. They should work with the companies that give disabled people jobs to make sure the disabled person feels they are doing well.
2. Disabled people should be able to help design the job they do. We should see them as a whole person who would like a career, not just a job.

# Multiple marginalisation

Many people know that different groups of people find it harder to find jobs. These groups are Māori, women, Pacifica people and disabled people. People do not always think good things about these people and make things difficult for them. If you are two or more of these groups it is even harder.

The Government money means that some people do not have the same options as others. The money is targeted at just one problem. Workbridge wants to do better. We want to make sure all our services are good for people of all cultures. We will talk to Government and NGOs. We want to work with them in partnership. We want to make sure disabled people can use all the programmes that are out there.

The Government should link businesses like Workbridge together. We are all trying to help people who have trouble finding a job.

## We recommend that:

1. Government and NGOs work together more. This will help more people who find it difficult to find a job for many reasons.

# Employer education and incentives

We are grateful to work alongside Business New Zealand. New Zealand is lucky to have this group that shows other businesses how important diversity is.

Most businesses like to be certain about things. Disability isn’t always certain. Most people do not understand disability. They think it is risky to give a disabled person a job. Workbridge helps employers understand disability. We talk to them about possibilities. We want to do more of this. It is very important that we keep helping people understand disability.

When we help an employer give a job to a disabled person, they might ask us to find more disabled people for other jobs.

We recently spent money on a radio advert. Many people were interested in us when they heard this advert. We didn’t have enough money to put this advert everywhere.

We could do a lot more if we had more money to educate the public. Many people know that more must be done. The Human Rights Commission did a report in 2018 called Tracking Equality. They said the Government should give money to change the way the public think. The whole of New Zealand should know about giving disabled people jobs and helping them keep their jobs.

The public think that giving disabled people jobs costs lots of money. They also think it is risky. But this is only because they do not understand. They do not understand that there is money to buy technology.

Some people are worried about giving a disabled person a job because of the Health and Safety at Work Act. They do not understand that it is okay to give the job to a disabled person. They may only think about one type of disability. They think it is difficult and dangerous to give that person a job. We should help them to understand that this is not the case. Worksafe should have a clear message.

Workbridge are experts at understanding how to give disabled people jobs. We think we should lead adverts that help to change people’s minds. We want to see people understand that they can give a disabled person a job.

Disabled people have value. We want to talk with people in business about how they can give disabled people a job. We know this is a very hard time for employers. The COVID-19 wage subsidy shows that money can be offered to employers. It shows that they can follow rules about how the money is used. We could offer a part or full wage subsidy if an employer chooses to give a job to a disabled person. This could mean many more disabled people get jobs. Many disabled people are desperate for someone to give them a chance to work. When someone gives us a chance, good things happen. There have been studies about how disabled people work. They take less sick leave. They perform well. They add value to the workplace.

The subsidy would have to be for a certain amount of time. An independent person would look at how well things went. Was it successful? Would more help be needed? We hope it would work well. If it worked well, the disabled person would keep the job. They would keep the job for double the subsidy time.

Some people are worried that employers would only pick disabled people who can do the most. This might be okay. When there are many disabled people with jobs other people can see that it is normal. This may mean even more disabled people getting jobs in the future. A subsidy scheme may be the best thing right now.

## We recommend that:

1. The Government, businesses, DPOs and Workbridge need to work closely together. They need to make an education campaign. It needs to tell people all the good things about employing disabled people. It needs to make sure that people understand that what they might believe about disabled people isn’t true. There should be adverts in the papers, in the streets, and online. There should also be workshops.
2. The country should be talking about whether we should give money to employers if they hire disabled workers.

# Leading by example

The way that Māori people do things is a good example. They take control of the services they use. Before then, Māori people were not involved in the decisions made about them. Disabled people have made a little progress, but nowhere near enough.

Workbridge is led by Chief Executives who live with disability. They have led for 11 years. The three top leaders at Workbridge all live with disability. We promise that Workbridge is a company run by and for disabled people.

Sadly, this is very rare in New Zealand. We are upset that not many disabled people have leadership positions in New Zealand.

* Now we have only one member of Parliament, Golriz Ghahraman, who has told us that they are disabled. Her multiple sclerosis was diagnosed after her election.
* There are not many disabled people who work for the government. Not enough disabled people help to make the decisions for our future.
* Not many disabled people are leaders or board members.
* It is very unusual to find a disabled person on a leadership team.

But it is very important that disable people are involved and have a say in their future.

We really want to see disability providers and the public service to lead by example. We also want to see people with money give that money to companies that have disabled people at the top.

We think disability service providers should be open. They should report to everyone how many disabled people work for them. They should tell us what levels disabled people work at.

We must welcome disabled people into jobs so that other people can too.

## We recommend that:

1. The Government and other providers of services to disabled people should let everyone know how many disabled people work there. There should be information about how many disabled people are in management.
2. The Government should encourage people to hire disabled workers. They should prefer to work with businesses who give leadership jobs to disabled people.

# Conclusion

Right now is a good time to look at the country and ask questions. The best question is, "What kind of country do we want to be?"

We are proud of New Zealand for being a world leader in many things. We gave women the right to vote. We are nuclear free. We should be a world leader for disabled people. We must think in new ways. We must think about people who do not have the same as everyone else.

People are important to a country. We are not doing everything we can for everyone. Disabled people want to be part of society and give to the country. We are failing them.

Now is a good time for the Government to look at the way they do things for disabled people. We want disabled people to have the best options. To end as we began, with a quote from the Prime Minister, "Let's do this".