

**Open employment
services for people
with disabilities
1995–96 and 1996–97**

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Open employment services for people with disabilities 1995–96 and 1996–97

**Phil Anderson
and
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1998

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Summary

This report presents data on open employment services for people with disabilities and the clients of these services, from January 1995. The primary focus of the report is a comparison of the characteristics of services and the experiences of clients in the 1995–96 and 1996–97 financial years.

Data were collected via the National Information Management System (NIMS) for open employment services, introduced on 1 January 1995. The development and implementation of the system were financially supported by the Department of Health and Family Services. The AIHW became involved during the implementation phase and is now Data Manager of the system, working alongside an independent Industry Development Manager representing service providers in the ongoing use and development of the system.

Employment and people with disabilities

Chapter 1 provides an introduction to the subject matter of the report, describing open employment services in Australia and the population they serve.

People with a 'handicap' (in terms used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics in their major disability survey) had much higher rates of unemployment in 1993 than the rest of the population; some 21.0% of people with a handicap were unemployed, compared with an estimate of 12.7% for the labour force overall. This inequality illustrates the potential role of specialist services which aim to help people with a disability to obtain and retain employment.

Under the Commonwealth *Disability Services Act 1986* employment services fall into two main categories: open employment services and supported employment services. In an **open employment service**, clients receive support from a service outlet but are directly employed by another organisation. In **supported employment services** clients are employed by the same organisation that provides the employment support. This report covers the activities of the open employment services only.

Service providers

Chapters 2 and 3 describe open employment services and their clients.

At the end of June 1996, there were 260 open employment sites using the NIMS system, of which 239 provided data. For the 12 months to 30 June 1997, 282 sites had installed NIMS systems, of which 268 provided data (Table S1). All States and Territories had open employment sites. In 1996–97 about three-quarters (75%) of all sites were in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland (Table S1). Some 66% of sites were in urban areas, 30% in rural areas and the remaining 4% in remote areas (Table S2).

Table S1: Number of open employment sites by State and Territory, 1995–96, 1996–97

State	1995–96					1996–97				
	Sites		Clients		Average clients per site	Sites		Clients		Average clients per site ^(a)
	Number	%	Number	%		Number	%	Number	%	
New South Wales	72	30.1	5,608	27.2	77.9	77	28.7	6,446	26.2	84.8
Victoria	60	25.1	6,613	32.1	110.2	66	24.6	8,063	32.8	122.2
Queensland	59	24.7	4,625	22.4	78.4	61	22.8	5,563	22.6	91.2
Western Australia	25	10.5	1,970	9.6	78.8	28	10.4	2,147	8.7	76.7
South Australia	8	3.3	906	4.4	113.3	14	5.2	1,120	4.6	86.2
Tasmania	6	2.5	281	1.4	46.8	8	3.0	360	1.5	45.0
Australian Capital Territory	7	2.9	527	2.6	75.3	9	3.4	730	3.0	81.1
Northern Territory	2	0.8	94	0.5	47.0	5	1.9	161	0.7	32.2
Australia	239	100.0	20,624	100.0	86.3	268	100.0	24,590	100.0	92.4

(a) When calculating the average number of clients per site, 1 site from New South Wales and 1 site from South Australia were omitted as records of support given were missing for all clients.

Table S2: Number of sites by location, 1995–96, 1996–97

Location	1995–96		1996–97	
	Number	%	Number	%
Urban	161	67.4	181	67.6
Rural	71	29.7	77	28.7
Remote	7	2.9	10	3.7
Total	239	100.0	268	100.0

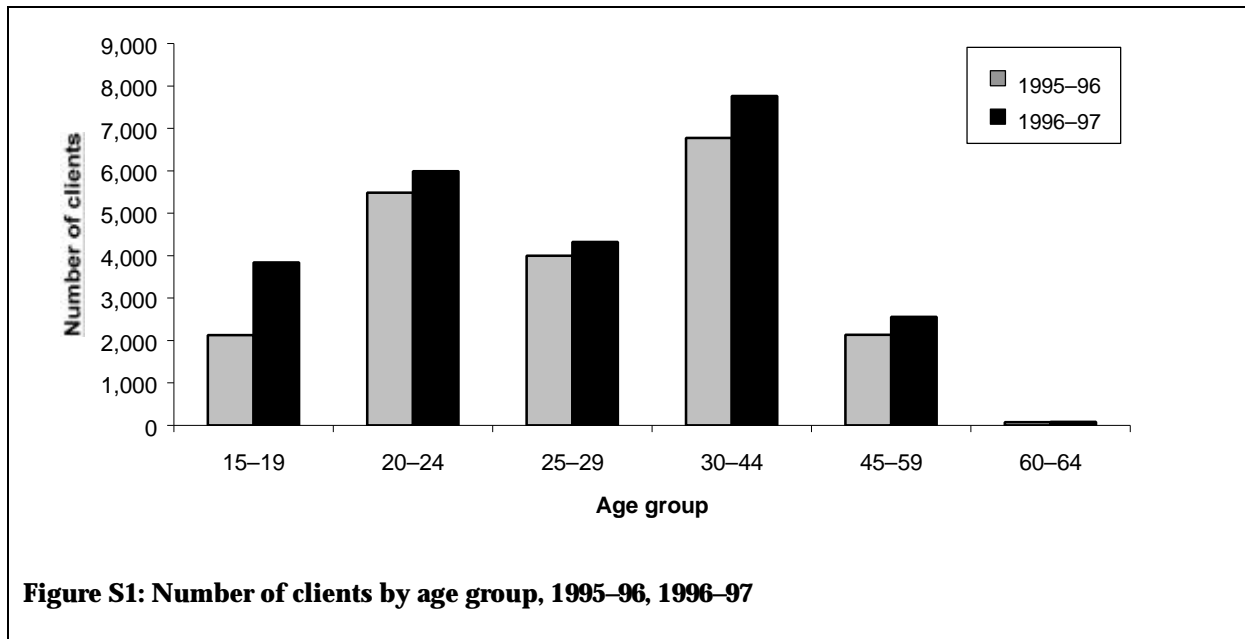
Note: Location is classified according to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services Rural and Remote Areas classification.

The average number of clients per site increased from 86 in 1995–96 to 92 in 1996–97. The percentage of sites having over 100 clients also increased markedly from 16% in 1995–96 to 37% in 1996–97. The average number of staff per site fell marginally from 6.6 in 1995–96 to 6.5 in 1996–97.

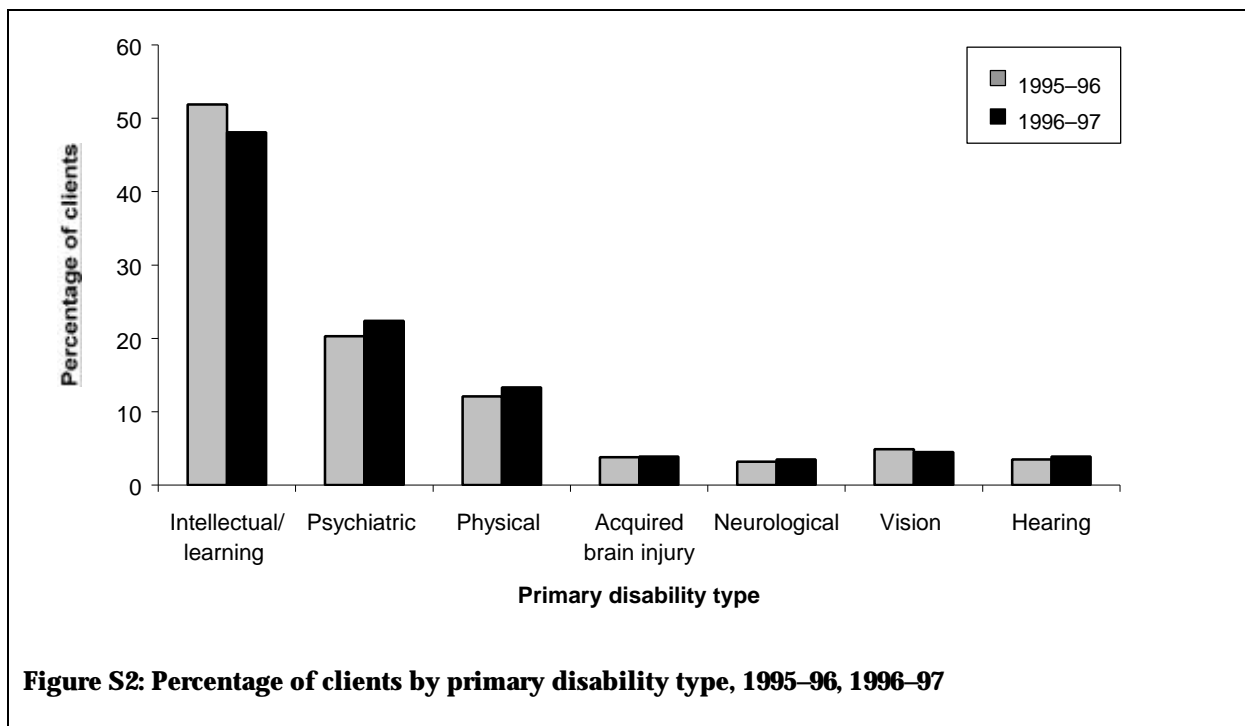
Clients

A total of 20,624 clients were recorded as having received some support from a service between 1 July 1995 and 30 June 1996, and 24,590 clients between 1 July 1996 and 30 June 1997.

Almost two-thirds of all clients were male (64% in 1995–96 and 63% in 1996–97). The age of clients ranged from 15 years to 64 years, with 89% being aged 44 years or less in both periods. The number of clients grew in each age group between 1995–96 and 1996–97, the largest relative growth being in the 15–19 year age group (Figure S1). Approximately 2% of clients were identified as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, which is similar to their representation in the general Australian population.

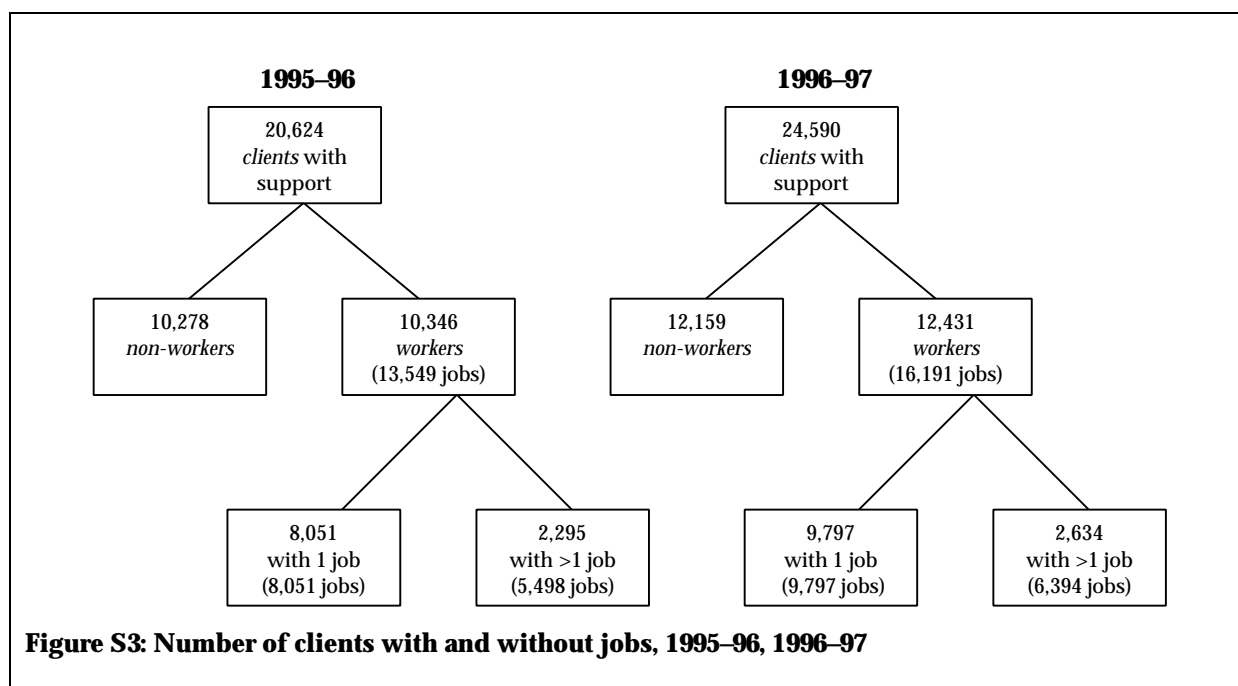


In 1996-97, almost half (48%) of people attending open employment services had intellectual/learning as their primary disability, followed by about a fifth (22%) who had a psychiatric disability and 13% who had a physical disability (Figure S2). This percentage distribution differs from that in 1995-96, where a higher percentage of people had intellectual/learning as their primary disability type (52%) and correspondingly lower percentages of people had psychiatric (20%) or physical disabilities (12%) as their primary disability.



Job characteristics

Chapter 4 details the characteristics of client jobs in 1995–96 and 1996–97. Of the 24,590 clients receiving support in 1996–97, 12,431 (51%) had at least one job in this period ('workers'). Of these 'workers', 9,797 or 79% had only one job and 2,634 or 21% had two or more jobs— similar proportions to those in 1995–96 (Figure S3). A total of 16,191 jobs were undertaken by workers during 1996–97.



In both 1995–96 and 1996–97, jobs were spread across all industry sectors, with the leading employers being in manufacturing (15% each year) and retail trade (13% and 14% respectively), followed by health and community services (9% each year). In both periods, the majority of all jobs were as labourers/related workers, with clerks and sales/personal staff as the other main occupational categories.

The median length of a job current at the end of 1995–96 was 44 weeks and at the end of 1996–97 was 48 weeks. The percentage of current jobs of 12 months or less duration declined between 1995–96 and 1996–97 and the percentage of jobs of 24 months or more duration increased. About two-thirds of jobs were on a permanent regular basis (63% in 1995–96 and 64% in 1996–97).

Client job experience

Chapter 5 presents a more detailed analysis of the experience of workers (Table S3).

Of all workers in 1996–97, 47% had a job at both the beginning and end of the period (termed 'job retained'), and 29% gained a job during the period and remained in employment at the end of the period ('job gained and retained'). A further 11% were employed at the beginning of the period but not at the end ('job lost'), and the remaining 12% had work at some time during the period but started and finished the period unemployed ('job gained and lost'). Compared with 1995–96, 1996–97 saw a higher

percentage of workers in the 'job retained' category (47%), with relatively lower percentages in the other categories, particularly 'job gained and lost' (12%).

Table S3: Job history of workers during 1995–96, 1996–97

Job history	Number	%
1995–96		
Job retained	4,485	43.4
Job lost	1,235	11.9
Job gained and retained	3,060	29.6
Job gained and lost	1,566	15.1
Total	10,346	100.0
1996–97		
Job retained	5,894	47.4
Job lost	1,415	11.4
Job gained and retained	3,585	28.8
Job gained and lost	1,537	12.4
Total	12,431	100.0

As at 1 July 1996, 7,309 clients had a job and this increased by 2,170 or 30% to 9,479 by 30 June 1997. The proportional increase from 1 July 1995 to 30 June 1996 was similar at 32%.

In order to analyse different aspects of a person's job experience, three sets of measures were calculated. These were:

- time in work (in weeks, per time in support, hours per work week, hours per week);
- mean wage (wage per hour, wage per work week, mean income per support week); and
- number of weeks to obtain a job.

In 1996–97 the average worker was in work for about 33 weeks, which equated to just under three-quarters (73%) of their time in support. This was a slight increase over 1995–96 (31 weeks or 70%), however the mean hours of work per working week fell from 25.5 to 24.8 between the periods. The latter trend almost compensated for the former, so that the mean hours of work per week in support increased slightly from 18.3 to 18.6. This figure is a reflection of the total hours of work per working client for the whole year (that is, the amount of work averaged over all of the time in support).

From 1995–96 to 1996–97 the mean hourly wage rate increased by 2.7% from \$9.16 to \$9.41. However, because of the decrease of similar magnitude in the mean hours of work per working week, the mean weekly wage remained at \$229. At the same time, the mean income per week of support increased from \$164 to \$170, reflecting an increase in mean income per year of 3.8% from \$7,344 to \$7,624. The average time taken to get a job (for those clients who obtained work after the beginning of the financial year) was 14.7 weeks in 1995–96 and 14.0 weeks in 1996–97.

Nearly all client characteristics studied (such as sex, primary disability type and living arrangements) appeared to be related to one or more of the measures of job experience in some way. Details are provided in Chapter 5.

Client support

Chapter 6 provides a detailed analysis of the support provided by agencies to clients, and the factors relating to it.

Support can be categorised as:

- support given directly to a client; and
- other support including general administration, general job search and travel.

The analysis in Chapter 6 focuses on direct support, because the recording of the 'other' category is optional in the data system. Of the recorded support times, approximately three-fifths of support hours go directly to the client.

People with an intellectual/learning disability received 62% of all direct support hours in 1996–97, down slightly from 66% in 1995–96. These clients also had the highest mean support per client. The next two largest groups were clients with a psychiatric disability who received 13% of direct support in 1996–97, and clients with a physical disability who received 11%.

Clients who had jobs (workers) received more support than other clients (non-workers) in both periods (2.0 versus 1.0 hours per week in 1996–97).

The amount of support received also varied with the length of time a client had been receiving support and the relationship of the support received to their job history. To analyse this further, the whole 30 months of NIMS data from 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997 has been used.

For workers who had one job continuously for the whole support period there was a small peak in support at the beginning of the period, after which support levelled out but with some seasonal variation.

For non-workers with ongoing support, the mean support peaked in the first four-week period and rapidly dropped over the next twenty-week period before declining and levelling out (Figure S4).

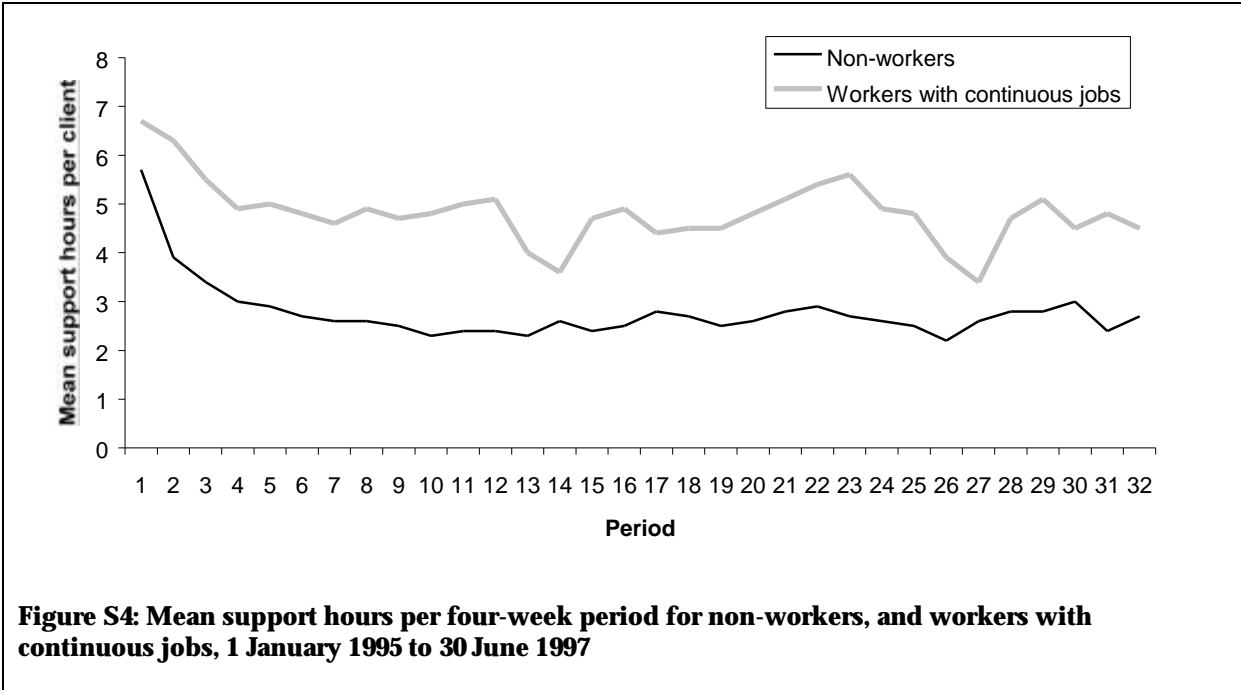


Figure S4: Mean support hours per four-week period for non-workers, and workers with continuous jobs, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997

The pattern of support for *other workers* varied with time, but this variation depended on their job history. For workers who gained a job there was a gradual increase in support during the pre-job phase followed by very large peaks of support just before and after

gaining a job. If the job was retained, mean support gradually declined to well under one hour per week (that is, less than four hours per four-week period), much less than the overall worker average and also less than for those who retained one job throughout the period (Figure S5).

The amount of support given at the time of obtaining a job that is retained does not appear to substantially depend on whether the client had a previous job or not (Figure S5).

Workers who lost a job had a small peak in support around the time of job loss, after which support declined to very low levels.

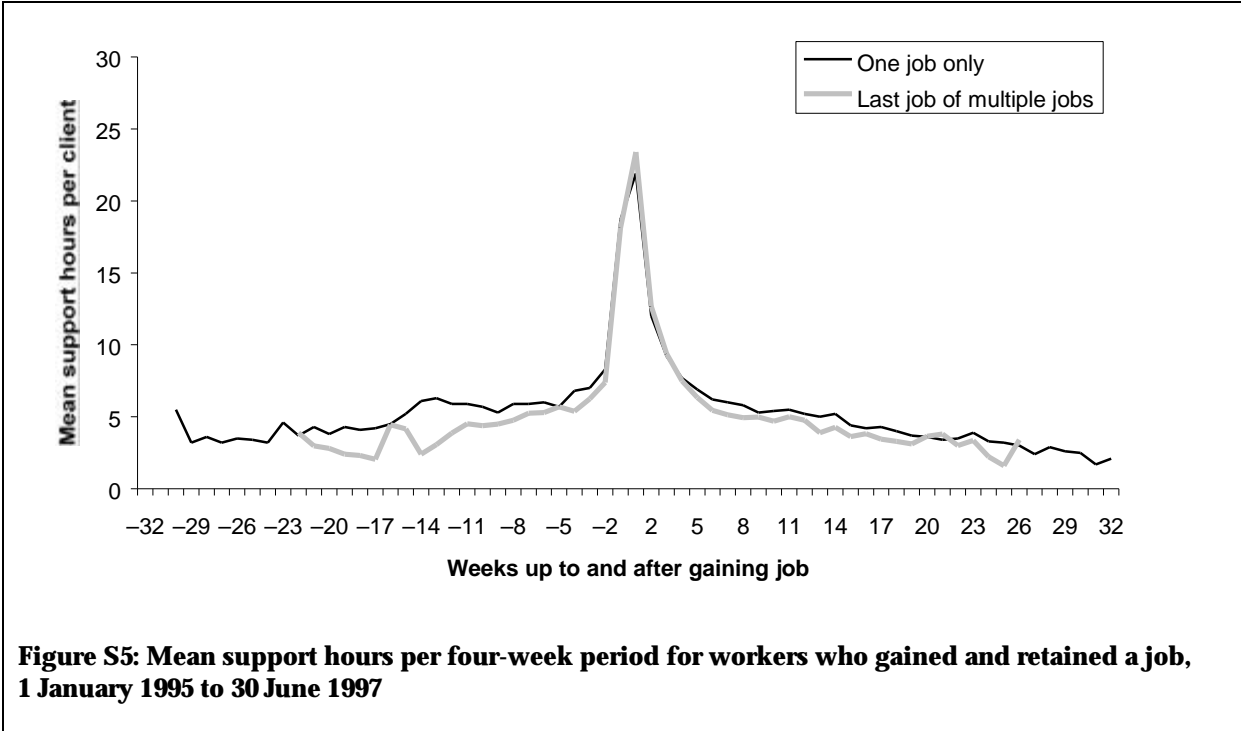


Figure S5: Mean support hours per four-week period for workers who gained and retained a job, 1 January 1995 to 30 June 1997

The support received by clients varied according to a number of characteristics such as sex, age, primary disability type, preferred spoken language, frequency of assistance required by clients for activities of daily living (one or more of self-care, mobility and verbal communication) and client type. For workers, differences were generally most apparent at the time of peak support when gaining a job.

