

13<sup>th</sup> February 2008

The Hon Brendan O'Connor MP  
Minister for Employment Participation  
Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Minister O'Connor

Thank you for your invitation to provide comment on how employment services can be improved.

Personnel Placement Consultancies (PPC) is a relatively new PAGES provider working as a DEN organisation since July 2006. We have also been contracted by Department of Human Services to deliver Job Capacity Assessments since July 2006. PPC has also provided vocational rehabilitation services within the workers' compensation market in SA for the past 11 years, specialising in securing new jobs for clients unable to return to their pre-injury work. Given our recent arrival into this PAGES market, experience linking clients to other DEEWR employment programs, and knowledge gained from vocational rehabilitation service delivery, PPC offers general observations regarding programme effectiveness and opportunities to improve and align service models.

PPC welcomes further development of early intervention programmes to address long term welfare dependency. From our experience completing JCA's and delivering DEN programmes in SA , PPC acknowledges that long term unemployed (and job seekers at risk of moving into long term unemployment) do require specialised, intensive case management and significant support. Country clients have the added difficulty of accessing resources with a more limited job market. Consideration could be given by DEEWR and DHS to make Job Capacity Account services available to new DEN and Vocational Rehabilitation referrals at particular risk of long term unemployment and disadvantage. The intake stages of programs do slow down client immediate access to counseling and health professional assistance. Reasonable funding levels for PAGES to directly purchase relevant health professional services during the intake stages of service delivery is another suggestion to improve outcomes for disadvantaged long-term unemployed.

We have been particularly impressed with the service delivery and payment model ascribed to the DEN uncapped program and believe that a similar model that has scope too seamlessly and rapidly include PSP and/or formal course training will achieve increased employment outcomes. We firmly believe a sole Provider responsible for the end to end service coordination and delivery will improve employment outcomes and help to reduce clients entering and ongoing experience of long-term unemployment and disadvantage

It is our view that clients need to access a seamless service which provides intervention across time and need, for example, to address chronic issues associated with long term unemployment through to training, job placement and post placement support. These programmes need to be realistic and well resourced when considering time frames. Given some individuals have not worked or do not have an employment history for the past 15-20 years and are now entering their 40's and 50's, there is no quick fix. Program models that perhaps include capacity upgrades and confidence and motivation building, coupled with formal training to the certificate IV or Diploma level, placement and post-placement support may more realistically need to be 3-4 years in duration to help the client achieve an employment goal.

Regarding access to training, from our experience we are aware that not all clients seek or require training, however, it is important that this be available and again if training is to be a serious strategy, the Government will need to consider longer term training. Again special consideration needs to be given to rural clients accessing training with options to fund client accommodation and transport to attend training that may only be readily available in a metropolitan location. Our experience as a DEN Uncapped Provider is that we will readily support clients with short term training to secure for example a fork-lift, truck, or security license, however, this program does not encourage referral and support for longer term training at the Certificate IV or Diploma level which will often result in increased employment mobility and higher wages as well as meeting labour market needs.

PPC is aware that the DEN star ratings have been controversial. PPC however, has welcomed the use of a performance measurement tool as we have typically operated in other jurisdictions without independent assessment of our performance benchmarked against other industry Provider's. We find the health checks and star rating system a clear and concise measure which assists us to manage and resource this programme, which we believe we are improving over time.

PPC is aware that the JCA is attracting criticism as an assessment tool and it is understood there will be a review in due course. Again, our experience of the JCA has been very positive and PPC is of the opinion that *suitably qualified and experienced* staff (such as rehabilitation consultants) have the skill and knowledge base to undertake these assessments. To date, we have not had any connections made to other PAGES rejected as inappropriate. Government perhaps may need to consider and re-assess the amount of time it takes to complete a Job Capacity Assessment for long term welfare dependent Australians. Greater flexibility to see clients on more than one occasion may also assist with the quality of assessment reports as well as the most suitable connection to a DEEWR program most of the time. With some clients, rapport and trust in order to complete thorough Assessments may take a few interviews.

While our staff has enjoyed the challenge of delivering JCA's, it is acknowledged that these assessments are very complex requiring considerable time and thought which regularly require activities outside of the funding model. People who are out of work in times of economic prosperity face significant barriers to labour market entry and are very often socially excluded.

We also believe there is scope for Government to consider moving the current Capped Vocational Rehabilitation and DEN programs to uncapped with consideration given to the possible amalgamation of these two programs with different streams.

PPC welcomes participation of the industry in any formal review as recommended in your document 'An Australian Social Inclusion Agenda'.

Thank you again for your invitation for feedback.

Yours sincerely

Steve Harrington  
Managing Director