



Australian Government

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations

Review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) New JSCI Questions and Answers



New JSCI Questions and Answers

How were the views of stakeholders accounted for in the review of the JSCI?

On 17 April 2008, the then Minister for Employment Participation, the Hon Brendan O'Connor MP, wrote to Job Network members, peak industry bodies and a range of community organisations, inviting submissions to the review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument (JSCI) by 12 June 2008. A total of 24 submissions were received (see Attachment D of the *Review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument* report).

The submissions to the review informed research and analysis for the new JSCI, which also included consultations with Centrelink and Job Network customer service officers, Job Capacity Assessors (JCAs) and the National Employment Services Association. Those submissions for which the authors gave permission for publication are available on the www.workplace.gov.au (Publications – Policy and Reviews – Review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument).

What were the Terms of Reference for the review of the JSCI?

The review examined how job seekers can be more effectively, appropriately and efficiently classified according to their disadvantage and needs. The resulting new JSCI delivers increased:

Effectiveness – in identifying job seekers for early intervention;

Appropriateness – in identifying disadvantage; and

Efficiency – in the timeliness and accuracy of assessments, as well as resulting referrals.

What were the main issues raised in the submissions to the review?

A number of common themes were raised in the submissions to the review. These themes included: the identification of triggers for referral to Job Capacity Assessment (JCA); measures of geographic disadvantage; assessment of Indigenous job seekers, particularly in remote locations; the better identification of job seekers with English language barriers; better assessment of those at risk of homelessness and; better assessment for sole parents.

Key themes raised in submissions to the review have been addressed through: refinements to JSCI questions; new questions; new factors and sub-factors; improved use of information on job seekers' income support histories and refinements to the identification of job seekers' barriers, including adjustments to existing triggers and new triggers for referral to JCA.

How was the review conducted?

In addition to considering submissions, the review included three components. These were:

- *qualitative analysis* through one-on-one interviews, workshops and/or focus groups with Centrelink Customer Service Advisers, Job Network staff, JCA providers and job seekers;
- *cognitive testing* with job seekers, Centrelink Customer Service Advisers and Job Network staff to assess new and refined JSCI questions, and;
- *econometric analysis* to explore potential refinements and ensure the reliability of the new JSCI.

The Social Research Centre (Melbourne) assisted the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations in conducting the qualitative analysis. TNS Social Research (Canberra) conducted the cognitive testing of JSCI questions. Professor Paul Miller and Dr. Anh Tram Le from the University of Western Australia provided consultancy services for the econometric analysis.

What are the main features of the new JSCI?

The new JSCI provides for better assessment of disadvantaged job seekers' barriers to employment. For example, proximity to a labour market, access to transport, job seekers' English language skills and job seekers' work capacity are all subject to improved assessment through new questions and factors. Overall, the new JSCI achieves a balanced holistic assessment of the individual job seeker's circumstances whether they reside in a remote, regional or metropolitan area.

In addition to improving the holistic assessment of a job seeker's circumstances through new questions and new factors, refinements have been made to the wording of some existing JSCI questions and response categories. These changes were made based on feedback from job seekers, JCA providers, Centrelink and employment services providers, to improve job seekers' understanding and increase the ease and efficiency of JSCI administration.

As a third important area of improvement, refinements have been made to the identification of job seekers' barriers to employment that serve as triggers for referral to JCA.

How does the new JSCI improve the assessment of locational disadvantage?

Job seekers who are locationally disadvantaged will be subject to better assessment through two new JSCI factors - Access to Transport (3 new questions) and Proximity to a Labour Market (improved use of labour market data). A new sub-factor specifically for Indigenous Australians is also included to improve assessment for those in regional and remote locations.

How has assessment for Indigenous job seekers been improved?

Overall, the new JSCI gives a more balanced holistic assessment of each individual's circumstances, barriers and needs. A new sub-factor, specifically for Indigenous Australians, is included in the JSCI to give better assessment for those in regional, remote and metropolitan locations.

A more refined measure of proximity to the labour market and new questions on access to transport contribute to the improved assessment of locational disadvantage. A new question that asks if a person spoke English as a child also adds to the assessment of an individual's barriers to employment. Job seekers who spoke an Indigenous language as a child, are allocated an additional JSCI point.

What changes are made to identify people with English language barriers?

A new question on whether a person spoke English as a child has been included in the JSCI to improve assessment for those with language barriers. A second new question, to identify whether a person has recently completed any training to improve their English language skills (i.e. within the past 6 months) has also been included.

As an additional enhancement, an English language training flag has been introduced as part of the JSCI. Where this flag is not set by a person's answers to the questions that comprise the improved English language factor, it can be manually set by the Centrelink Customer Service Advisers, JCA provider, or Job Services Australia provider.

What improvements are made for assessing a person's work capacity?

A number of improvements have been made to identify job seekers with disability and medical conditions for referral to JCA as appropriate to their needs. To assess work capacity, a more open-ended question is included on the hours a person believes they are capable of working (they are asked about the number of hours they can work, rather than whether they can work at least 15 hours per week). The trigger for referral to JCA has also been adjusted from less than 15 hours per week, to less than 30 hours per week.

How has the assessment of people with disability been improved?

The questions contributing to assessment of disability and medical conditions have been revised to give a new focus on the number of hours the person feels they are able to work and the type of work they can undertake. New questions have also been added to assess whether the person feels they will require support to help them in the workplace and how long a medical condition may impact on their ability to work. In addition to an adjustment to the hours a job seeker believes they are able to work (from less than 15 hours, to less than 30 hours per week), a job seeker's

response that they need workplace support will also serve as a trigger for JCA referral.

What improvements are made in assessing a job seeker's history of unemployment?

The new JSCI will take better account of a job seeker's history of income-support receipt, using information systems records. A person's receipt of Newstart Allowance, Youth Allowance (other), Parenting Payment, Disability Support Pension and other payments will be automatically examined for a period as far back as the previous 10 years. These changes improve the assessment of a person's accumulated time in unemployment and any time they may have spent out of the labour force. As additional improvements, a check is also made on whether a person has received a Centrelink Crisis Payment in the past 6 months and the intergenerational disadvantage that impacts on some job seekers is accounted for through a new question about whether the person's parents worked.

How does the new JSCI assess job seekers who are homeless, or at risk of homelessness?

Refined questions on whether a person has been living in secure accommodation, or is currently in temporary or emergency accommodation, are included in the new JSCI. Information on a job seeker's stability of accommodation also continues to be gathered through a question on how many times a person may have moved residence in the most recent year. A new automatic check on whether a person has received a Centrelink Crisis Payment in the past 6 months also improves the assessment of a job seeker's circumstances.

What improvements have been made to identify disadvantaged young people?

The new JSCI allocates increased points to disadvantaged teenagers, including: those mainly unemployed for the past 2 years; Indigenous Australians; those with less than year 10 schooling; those who are homeless or at risk of homelessness; sole parents and ex-offenders. Changes have also been made to the arrangements for referral to JCA, with people of 21 years of age or younger requiring only a single trigger. Together with other improvements to the holistic assessment of an individual's circumstances, this will assure that disadvantaged young people receive the services that are appropriate to their needs.

More broadly, under the new Stream services arrangements, young people in crisis who are not already participating in employment services are eligible for immediate commencement in Stream 4. Special arrangements are in place to allow for young people identified as Vulnerable Youth and Vulnerable Youth (Students) to undertake direct registration into Stream 4 with Job Services Australia providers.

How does the new JSCI improve assessment for parents?

The new JSCI provides improved assessment for both partnered and sole parents through a balanced holistic assessment of the individual's barriers and needs.

Partnered parents will now receive points under the Living Circumstances factor which are not allocated in the existing JSCI. Both sole and partnered parents will receive additional points through an improved assessment of a person's income support history and time out of the labour force. For example, a sole parent on income support for the past 2 years will be allocated 12 additional points, while those on income support for between 1 and 2 years will be allocated 6 additional points. All teenage sole parents will automatically receive a further 4 points.

What improvements have been made to assess job seekers' educational attainments?

The questions and response categories that comprise the educational attainment and vocational qualifications factor have been refined based on feedback from job seekers, Centrelink, JCA providers and employment services providers. These refinements were made to improve the identification of a job seeker's highest level of educational/vocational qualification.

Why have changes been made to the questions relating to criminal convictions?

The questions and response categories that comprise the criminal convictions and ex-offender factor have been refined based on feedback from job seekers, Centrelink, JCA providers and employment services providers. New questions have also been added. These refinements were made to better encourage disclosure by job seekers and improve the assessment of the individual's level of labour market disadvantage.

How does the JSCI trigger referral to Job Capacity Assessment?

When, as part of undertaking the JSCI, a job seeker is identified as having serious or multiple barriers to employment, they are referred for a JCA for comprehensive assessment to identify the most appropriate services and support requirements. Referral for a JCA does not depend on the job seeker's JSCI score. Rather, it is based on the separate identification of barriers to employment which occurs as part of the job seeker undertaking the JSCI. A job seeker with a relatively low JSCI score may have identified barriers that trigger their referral to JCA.

What changes have been made to the triggers for Job Capacity Assessment?

The new JSCI is more sensitive to the identification of job seekers' barriers to employment. For example, the trigger for work capacity has been adjusted. Previously, referral for a JCA was triggered when a job seeker's disability or medical condition led them to report they are able to work 'less than 15 hours per week'. Under the new JSCI, referral for a JCA will occur when the job seeker reports they are able to work 'less than 30 hours per week'. There are new triggers where a job

seeker reports restrictions on the type of work they can undertake, identifies workplace support requirements, or has recently received a Centrelink Crisis Payment. The 'special needs' trigger for young people aged 21 years or less is also more sensitive, with a reduction from the identification of three conditions, to one condition.

Further Information:

Requests for further information on the Review of the Job Seeker Classification Instrument may be sent, by email, to: JSCI@deewr.gov.au