

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

Dear Mr O'Connor

Re: Views on how Employment Services can be improved.

Firstly thank you for the invitation to express our views in this submission. As a long term successful Job Network provider in the ACT we welcome opportunities to improve on what we do, and create new pathways for the unemployed.

I have dot pointed the issues in Job Network that I believe to be problem areas, and am only too happy to expand on these where necessary.

- Early interventions at the present time are often being missed by Centrelink, by wrongly assessing a client as Job Network suitable. Just by looking at the Quest caseload alone, in our Woden office 49% of our clients are on medical exemptions, and 39% of these are exemptions that will be long term due to major mental disorders. This is an on going issue. Engagement in Job Network is futile, unless these people are given the assistance that will prepare them for looking for work, and presenting themselves in a positive light to employers
We believe that a 'new' program should be introduced to cater for this cohort of people that are clearly not suited to Job Network. PSP and DEN are often not the right place for these people to be. Currently if a client does not present with medical evidence for a JCA, the JCA has no alternative but to send them back to job network. This in turn affects our star ratings, when we can't do anything to assist these clients.
- Clients are wrongly assessed as JSS, and often it is too difficult to upgrade this given the current JSCI tool on EA3000. Often important elements are missed in the initial assessment that is conducted at Centrelink, and the enormous amount of administration to change this later is more difficult than it is worth, not to mention the scrutiny of the DEEWR auditing process.
Job Network would be better at assessing the clients that they see. It is the Job Network that develops the relationships with these clients, and as we get to know them, we can then assess them more accurately and effectively.
- **Payments to Job Network**, This should be fair and equitable. In the current market of high inflation, this should be reviewed on a annual basis. There have been no significant changes to the fee structure in the last two contracts, and this creates major pressure on management expenses, retention of staff, and finding appropriately qualified people to service the industry. We are unable to offer staff CPI increases, thus creating higher staff turnover, increased costs in recruitment and training, not to mention staff shortages.
- **Reduction of administration-** The aim of Job Network is to place people into sustainable employment. At present we are still dealing with the recalcitrant attitude of the previous government by killing Job Network with administration and un-bendable attitudes to compliance. Files are audited, but DEEWR do not take the time to view evidence on EA3000. When reports are requested from DEEWR the requirements for proof and evidence have become pedantic and costly to Job Network, this time could be better spent in finding employment for our clients.

- **3 by 13 for ISca clients-** This is one of the most cumbersome activities, and one of the heaviest in terms of administration, evidence gathering and compliance. The easiest ways of getting it done as a DEEWR requirement for evidence is to push the administration and the gathering of this evidence on to the Job Seeker. This does not improve employment outcomes in any way in relation to skills or experience. It is more of a way for DEEWR to monitor us rather than a tool to assist people find work.
- **KPI's for PSP-** employment outcomes as a KPI should be removed from PSP. PSP should be assistance by way of counselling and assistance to get into programs, training or rehabilitation. Thus removing the pressure to push people into a position that they are incapable of keeping due to mental illness or drug/alcohol dependency issues. If PSP is going to service the current level of clients, then we need to be employing psychologists, and this needs to be taken into account by DEEWR. To have higher needs clients on the caseload, and then push for employment outcomes as a KPI defeats the purpose of PSP.
Once again the wrong people are making judgements about who should be on PSP. Some clients often see this as a 2 year break from having to look for work, and PSP counsellors are able to assess better if this is the case, and remove these clients from an already choked system. Thus leaving a place for those people who need it.
- **Intensive Support for PSP** -There needs to be a system in place that can give more intensive support within PSP; as the greater number of clients are drug/alcohol dependent or have mental illnesses but are refusing or unable to be referred to other providers, like mental health or rehab. PSP on it own is unable to meet the needs of these clients due to limitations of: time, money, support and in some cases training and experience.
Add a program to PSP for Intensive Support Clients that can also be linked to a JSKA account to assist with more suitable services, and expenses relating to that. By allowing the PSP to assess these clients by way of an Assistance Needed Instrument
- **Communication between stakeholders-** This would save on time and money and also reduce stress and confusion for both staff and clients. Communication is often lacking or confusing between departments and providers
EA3000 only offers a part of the picture, sadly information held by DEEWR and Centrelink via EA3000 is very different. Often confusion can be avoided, by more shared information.
All stakeholders need to communicate better and learn more about each others roles, EA3000, needs to be more transparent, so we can all work together. DEEWR and Centrelink talk about the success of job shadowing; this has not been that successful from a Job Network perspective. Mainly due to the lack of it happening.
- **Access to the JSKA** - To give greater access to the Job Seeker account for clients that would benefit the most from it, not just those that meet the ISca classification. **Removal of the continuum and open up the JSKA to better assist people into work.**
- We have an urgent need for immediate follow up by DEEWR, on concerns that we have with clients. Too often these are forgotten about by DEEWR. The current system of Irretrievable breakdown does not work, and is a lengthy process, leaving our staff at risk even after we have gone to court to have an AVO taken out. Issues such as these drag on and on with no accountability from DEEWR, they are time consuming for Job Network staff, unproductive and very inefficient as the outcomes are less than favourable and pose a OH&S risk to staff. There are also the legal issues around duty of care to staff, under Government law. Current DEEWR policy is undermining this.
- The star ratings in it's current system is not an accurate measure of how well a Job Network is performing. Currently clients on exemptions are also counted which puts sites (like the ACT, where unemployment is at the lowest in the country) at a

disadvantage when pitted against National levels. Organisations in 'shrinking' ESA's should not be assessed with a 'one size fit's all' approach. If this continues, sites are likely to lose business share for the wrong reasons, thus putting organisations out of business.

In closing, it would probably assist Government agencies to see things from the 'trenches'. Decisions are too often made without accurate knowledge of what is actually happening. When DEEWR meetings are requested, it helps if the DEEWR staff have a realistic understanding, appreciation and knowledge of the industry. Not to mention the Job Seekers themselves. It goes without saying that it is easier to sell a product when you know the product, and how it works.

Yours Sincerely

Linda Baxendale
Job Network Contract Manager
Quest Employment and Training Solutions.