



15 February 2008

Senator the Hon Joe Ludwig
Minister for Human Services
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister Ludwig

**RE: Job Capacity Assessments (JCA) and Job Capacity Account
Services (JCAc)**

Thank you for your request to provide a submission on Active Employment Services' views on how JCA and JCAc services can better meet the needs of people with barriers to work, service providers and the Australian community.

The following is our response to the specific areas of interest:

1. Job Capacity Assessment Guidelines, particularly as they relate to assessment and referral practices.

Overall the JCA Guidelines are clear and informative. The examples are appropriate and helpful throughout. Task Cards provide detailed instructions which assist to complete referrals. However, the Guidelines are a very complex document, and can be a difficult document to navigate. The amount of changes made to the Guidelines over time has also made it difficult for Assessors to easily access the changes. In addition, the Guidelines have been modified significantly since our contract commenced, however the performance of the EA3000 system does not always reflect these changes.

Inclusion of an 'overview of changes' page, which is updated regularly, on the front of the guidelines would be useful. Receiving a full updated Guidelines document every 6 weeks, which needs to be provided to the Assessors (many hundreds of pages), is a time consuming requirement. We suggest that an updated page which can be added to our existing Guidelines documents would simplify this process, rather than having to download the large updated Guidelines every 6 weeks.

Other useful tools would include:

- A more comprehensive list of support facilities used by Centrelink to broaden the support base we refer our clients to.
- Sharing of information about successful programmes other Assessors/JCA providers have referred to.

2. The appropriateness and range of the qualifications necessary for Job Capacity Assessors to undertake assessments of people with different disabilities, including those with a mental illness

We consider that the range of professionals that conduct JCAs and their qualifications is adequate. In regards to mental health clients, Occupational Therapists, Physiotherapists, Social Workers, Doctors, Speech Therapists, Rehabilitation Counsellors, Nurses and Psychologists may all work with these clients in their area of employment and training is included in their respective courses of study. We consider that these professions are well qualified to work with these clients.

However, we consider that the issue isn't the qualifications of the assessors but rather their rather work experience. We believe that new graduates of these disciplines do not have sufficient work experience to effectively complete a JCA with a complex client or a client with mental health issues. We believe that at least 1 to 2 years of work experience would be an appropriate requirement for JCA assessors assigned to complete these assessments.

We consider that the work experience gained by health professionals in the vocational rehabilitation field has provided our JCA assessors with excellent assessment, liaison, and referral skills.

3. The quality of information recorded during the assessment process, including whether this is sufficient to assist agencies making decisions on income support and/or employment assistance.

We believe that the quality of JCA reports is dependent on several things:

1. The work experience of the JCA Assessor- see above.
2. The amount of assessments the JCA Assessor is expected to complete in one day. We consider that assessors who are expected to complete 5 to 6 assessments a day on an ongoing basis provide lower quality reports as time is needed to complete the assessments fully and carry out follow up and referral actions.

3. The expectation that the JCA always be completed at the time of interview, which is at times impossible given the amount of follow-up actions required to complete quality assessments and referrals.
4. The fee we can currently charge for JCA assessments is considered to be inadequate. The fee does not even cover the current standard professional fee of the Allied Health Professional that conducts the JCAs. In addition, the fee does not fully cover the following vital components of the assessment:
 - Follow up and liaison with doctors, and other health professionals and service providers etc.
 - Investigation of and Referral onto appropriate services
 - The administration time required to manage individual clients and ensure low DNA rates etc
 - The administration/ management time for our JCA contract.
 - The current fee for a medical JCA barely covers the interview time. If the fee was increased then an investment in more follow up time could be made.

In order to provide high quality assessments and reports, Active has spent as much time required on Management of the contract and individual assessments, at times to the detriment of our income and business return. We are committed to continuing to provide quality assessments however feel that the fees need to be increased to make this viable for all providers with JCA contracts.

5. The current timeliness KPI to complete the JCA report within 10 business days of **referral**. Unfortunately, this is difficult to achieve when the client does not attend or reschedules the appointment. We have put in a huge amount of procedures and effort to ensure clients do not DNA or reschedule, however this is not always within our control. The JCA interview can often occur after the timeliness deadline which makes it obviously impossible to achieve. We consider this to be an ineffective measure and unfair as a KPI. We believe that the timeliness KPI should be measured from the time of the JCA appointment attendance by the client.

In regard to including sufficient information to assist agencies to make decisions regarding income support, this is difficult to answer. As a JCA provider we have been advised that we should not become involved in income support decisions. Therefore we are not privy to this process and what is required in making these decisions.

Active has had predominantly positive feedback from PAGES providers about the information recorded in our JCA reports.

4. The appropriateness of arrangements to ensure attendance to Job Capacity Assessments

Active Employment Services has worked hard to develop systems to ensure JCA attendance, at not cost.

In our experience, the following would assist Jobseekers to attend appointments:

- The agency booking the JCA **must** explain to the Jobseeker what the JCA entails and whenever possible, book it whilst the Jobseeker is with them. At present, the client does not always know about their JCA assessment or what it entails. We have had many Jobseekers receive an appointment letter in the mail to attend a JCA without prior knowledge of the assessment. One of our expectations is that the referring agency makes the appointment when face-to-face with the Jobseeker.
- The referring agency needs to ensure that the Jobseeker's contact details are up to date, as far as is practicable, to allow for reminder calls and correspondence.
- If the Jobseeker's circumstances change, the referring agency should advise us to assist in the management of DNAs. We have had situations where the Jobseeker has passed away, been incarcerated, moved state or found employment and we have not been notified of this.
- Providing the JCA provider with bus passes to make available to jobseekers to attend an appointment, as at times they do not have the funds to get to the JCA appointment.

5. The role of the Job Capacity Account program, including the effectiveness of the current referral arrangements to the Job Capacity Account and the Job Network

Active considers that the Job Capacity Account program has been a very effective and a helpful program for Jobseekers. We have seen many successful outcomes for our JCA clients, including obtaining employment as a result of the services provided. We consider that now the program requires increased resources to allow for longer programs for job seekers if required, and a longer duration of time to provide this service.

The current referral arrangements are easy to use and effective. However, not having a restriction (currently 50%) on referring in-house would be more efficient and give the opportunity for the JCAc Consultant to meet the JCA jobseeker at the conclusion of a JCA assessment. This will enhance the relationship and may reduce DNAs for JCAc services, and provide better outcomes.

6. Key strengths of the current arrangements and any lessons for the future, from your knowledge of current and past arrangements in Australia and internationally

The key strengths of the Job Capacity Assessment program and the Job Capacity Account program include:

- Ability for clients to have a confidential forum to assess their vocational and emotional needs.
- Use of qualified and experienced health professionals as JCA assessors.
- Direct referral links to appropriate support programs and services increases the effectiveness and outcomes for clients.
- Online Computer based format which is easy to use and access
- Good outcomes from JCAc programs assisting clients with psychological and physical support.
- Provision of extensive training manuals, procedures, support and liaison by the Department of Human Services.

Thank you for asking Active Employment Services to comment on the JCA process. Should you have any further queries please do not hesitate to contact me on (08) 9367 9166.

Yours sincerely

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