

Review of Job Capacity Assessment and Job Capacity Accounts

Observations and recommendations in response to Senator The Hon Joe Ludwig's request for information.

Interwork Limited Response

Incorporating learning and models from Shaw Trust UK

Introduction

Interwork Limited welcomes the opportunity to respond to Senator The Hon Joe Ludwig request for input into the effectiveness of the Job Capacity Assessor and Job Capacity Accounts processes.

Interwork delivers government employment services to over 1500 people each year who are disadvantaged in the employment market through disability and other life circumstances. Programmes provided are

- DEN Capped and Uncapped with an estimated 40% market share of the South Australian metropolitan and regional areas;
- PSP, JPET and STEPS;
- Ceduna Remote Bundled Services;

Interwork offers the additional benefit to the Australian government of labour market knowledge and experience of Shaw Trust UK due to a unique commercial relationship. The objective of which is to provide the benefits of the UK's strongest disability employment provider to the Australian public.

In 2006-07 Shaw Trust supported more than 12,000 long-term welfare dependent people to move from benefits into employment. Shaw Trust is currently enabling about 800 people a month to move from incapacity benefits into work via the delivery of New Deal for Disabled People. 78% of those people sustain those jobs for more than 3 months.

Shaw Trust delivers the following programmes in the UK and has achieved considerable growth in services based upon performance.

Interwork therefore provides a response to Senator Ludwig's request that includes over 17 year's experience of service delivery in Australia and 20 year's experience

from the UK. Both organisations are committed to employment as the most effective pathway to social inclusion.

Interwork has also consulted widely with ACE National and supports the position and operational details with respect to the experience of DEN providers.

Interwork also believes in the value of the PSP programme and supports Ostara Limited's comments regarding the importance and benefits of this programme.

Interwork welcomes the opportunity for open consultation. We would also welcome the opportunity to provide more detailed information with respect to UK assessment processes and learning. In forming our response we refer to the impact the JCA assessment policies and processes have had in the viability of the DEN Uncapped programme and the barriers (largely we believe unintended, but still very real) the JCA assessment policies and actual processes have created for the engagement of People with a Disability in employment.

Our response therefore is driven by a belief that Australia needs a system that will improve participation rates in the workforce for people who experience disadvantage through disability and other circumstances. Regrettably it is our experience that the current system for a number of reasons has actually achieved the opposite.

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1 Policy Drivers

1.1 Income and Assessment and Employment Participation Assessment are conflicting objectives. The current model has the one assessment process for two very different purposes. It is our experience that the medical model used is relevant for the assessment of income and totally ineffective as a tool for the determination of effective employment support services.

- We take the view that there are many people working with serious medical conditions and disabilities; the disability itself is not the barrier to employment. Barriers to employment fall within the following groups:
- Attitudes to their disability;
- Lack of confidence in themselves due to their disability;
- Lack of positive employment experiences is almost always a barrier;
- Lack of basic and/or vocational skills.

The solutions to these barriers are not found in a medical approach to disability or disadvantage. Sometimes people need additional support to enable them to manage their condition or disability within a workplace – this is a minority of our clients and is overcome by working in partnership with specialist condition management organisations to ensure this support is available.

Recommendation: That assessment for income support is separated from assessment for access to employment services. The medical model is may continue to be appropriate for this assessment purpose.

Recommendation: That assessment and streaming to employment services be aligned to psycho/social/physical barriers assessment.

Recommendation: That assessment for service access is provided by licensed employment service providers with a range of programmes through virtual or established “one stop shops” at the ESA level.

1.2 : Whole of Government Considerations: The range and level of services available is dependent upon a medical assessment process, available places in a programme in an area and is driven by programme protocols rather than support needs. Default arrangements for DEN Capped result in disability job seekers being referred to Job networks where the service levels are considerably less and access is not within their resources to provide.

Recommendation: That policy with respect to service access must also be reviewed in a whole of government approach to employment participation, social inclusion, the building of social capital and capacity and the management of welfare payments.

1.3 Appropriateness of medical Model for Aboriginal Referees It is our experience in areas of high aboriginal populations such as Ceduna, Pt Lincoln, and Pt Augusta that the JCA process and attendant supports are inadequate to deal with the requirements of this group. The closure of CDEPs has resulted in many aboriginal people being referred for a JCA assessment. In the absence of traditional European medical histories and records aboriginal people are being referred to employment programmes rather than the DSP. We then as a programme provider spend considerable effort in assisting people to access the medical system to achieve the appropriate benefit provision. This is counter to programme performance guidelines and allocation of resources and funding.

Recommendation: That policy for assessment be developed with respect to the needs of the participants, key target groups and be culturally and socially aware of the impact of poverty and disadvantage.

1.4 : Alignment of Service Objectives and Fee Structure; Interwork has offices across the whole of regional, and metropolitan South Australia. It is our experience that services from JCA providers differ significantly due to availability of skilled staff, time of assessment interview, response to requests to review the assessment once participants have engaged with our service and disclosed further information relating to psycho/social/physical barriers. We note that the fee paid may not always allow providers to provide the standard of assessment necessary. This is particularly so in regional and remote areas when the client numbers and staff availability result in limited access to services, long referral periods and in some instances telephone based assessment.

Recommendation: That the requirements and fee structure be aligned to the capabilities of the delivery systems and the special needs of regional and remote services.

1.5 Consistency of Delivery Required: The current level of inconsistency in the JCA referrals to programmes indicates the level of confusion about the differences and applicability of the current number of programmes. Most confusion appears to result from inappropriate definitions of disability that seem to relate more to its origin than impact on employment. Statistics regarding inappropriate referrals and the level of job readiness of people referred require analysis and wider dissemination to ensure decisions are fact based.

Assessment of an individual's confidence and self esteem, their individual circumstances (such as their housing situation, care responsibilities, levels of debt and so on); anything which could conceivably be a barrier to them moving into employment is a requirement of this process. Also included is an understanding of their basic and vocational skills and information about any previous employment, including voluntary work

It is the quality and content of this early intervention, as much as its timing, and the fact that assistance continues after an individual is employed, which are the keys to success.

Recommendation: Early assessment should be immediate, comprehensive, and relevant to employment assistance programmes and provided by the service provider to be implemented immediately in a supportive environment. This is operational detail that is vital to success.

1.6 Appropriateness of JCA Qualifications and Job Capacity Account use; It is our experience that the qualifications of assessors are appropriate for a medical model of understanding of disability and disadvantage. This approach seems to carry the following underlying assumptions:

- That “disability can be healed”;
- That sever mental health no longer exists once people “take their meds”;
- That if 60% of the body or mind is unaffected then the remaining 40% can be employed effectively;
- That people dealing with cancer and other such illness can still participate effectively in job search and employment;
- That aboriginal clients who have significant chronic illness, social barriers and no work history are ready for employment in the absence of medical records to support their situation;
- That the appropriate employment programme depends upon the origin of the disability. Congenital disability should therefore be assisted through DEN and acquired disability through Voc Rehab.
- That the only avenue to allow people with mental health including stress and anxiety is to force participation in what is inherently for many people a stressful process.

- That the application of a quick JCA Account training programme will ‘adjust’ personality traits such as anger management and “make” people suitable and safe in the workplace.

These simplistic approaches lead to many inappropriate referrals and much stress for participants. The medical model may be effective for income assessment. However it does lead to inappropriate referrals and an inordinately inefficient use of employment resources. .

The above can be seen as emotional. It should not be rejected for that reason and there is no need to apologise for that as the case managers who deliver employment services work from a sense of social justice as well as a focus on performance through employment outcomes and contract compliance.

1.7 Quality of Information and Referrals; The JCA system speaks for itself. As a DEN provider we spent inordinate amounts of time and resources in educating JCA staff about our programme, coaching clients through the process and seeking reassessments to appropriate programmes. When we work closely with a JCA referral levels improve when the focus moves away from solicitation for referrals the numbers and quality drops.

The Department is exceptionally professional and dedicated. The management consulted widely with providers and peak bodies when establishing the guidelines. There was a belief that the final product was presented as having clear objectives and guidelines for referral. Regrettably, this is not the reported experience of service providers and it therefore points to significant policy and systemic confusion as its source.

Recommendation: That the Minister consults widely with the sector to ensure the next iteration meets the job seekers and service providers.