

## **Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment**

### **QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Supplementary Budget Estimates 2014-2015**

#### **Outcome 1 - Employment**

**Department of Employment Question No. EM1620\_15**

**Senator Lines provided in writing.**

#### **Question**

##### **Work for the Dole - participation requirements**

The 2014-15 Budget provides that job seekers will have to do 25 hours of Work for the Dole activities per week in order to receive Newstart payments (15 hours per week in the trial sites). - Are there any exceptions to this requirement? - Will job seekers who can show that they are actively seeking work be excluded? - Will job seekers with disability be excluded? o If not, If so what arrangements will be made for the inherent restrictions on work that a person in receipt of a Disability Support Pension has? - Will job seekers be excused from Work for Dole participation requirements on any given day where they may have other job seeker commitments such as interviews? - What happens if a job seeker is unwell/otherwise prevented from completing the required hours per week? - If a job seeker is sick or otherwise prevented from completing the required number hours per week, will they have to make up the missed hours? o If so, how will the missed hours be made up, will job seekers have to do additional hours over the course of a number of weeks? If so, over how many weeks? - Are there any exceptions to the plan to dock the fortnightly income support of Work for the Dole job seekers by 10% for every day they fail to show up for their Work for the Dole requirements?

#### **Answer**

**The 2014-15 Budget provides that job seekers will have to do 25 hours of Work for the Dole activities per week in order to receive Newstart payments (15 hours per week in the trial sites) Are there any exceptions to this requirement?**

Job seekers who are participating in sufficient paid part-time work to satisfy their Mutual Obligation requirements will not be required to undertake Work for the Dole. In addition, job seekers who are not on a full rate of income support cannot be compelled to undertake Work for the Dole.

There are also a range of exemptions from mutual obligation requirements that recognise the different family and personal situations that recipients may face which may prevent them from undertaking Work for the Dole. The Department of Human Services may also grant temporary exemptions for specified periods of time, for example due to temporary illness or incapacity (as evidenced by a doctor's medical certificate). During the period of the exemption, the job seeker is not required to undertake any activities. However, when the period of the exemption ends, the job

seeker will be expected to resume meeting their mutual obligation requirements, including any remaining requirements in relation to Work for the Dole.

**Will job seekers who can show that they are actively seeking work be excluded?**

No, actively looking for Work does not exclude Job Seekers from participating in Work for the Dole.

**Will job seekers with disability be excluded? If not, If so what arrangements will be made for the inherent restrictions on work that a person in receipt of a Disability Support Pension has?**

Disability Support Payment (DSP) recipients under the age of 35 who have an assessed work capacity of at least eight hours per week (without a youngest child under six years) are required to undertake compulsory activities as outlined in their Participation Plan with the Department of Human Services (DHS). This may include a referral to Job Services Australia (JSA). Where the DSP recipient's compulsory activity is participation in JSA, their Employment Pathway Plan will outline the activities they have agreed to undertake with their provider to assist them in finding work, this may include participation in Work for the Dole. DSP recipients with compulsory requirements do not however have a specific hour requirement for Work for the Dole participation. Where the DSP recipient with compulsory requirements and their provider agree that they should participate in Work for the Dole, they will negotiate an appropriate number of hours of participation which takes into account their individual circumstances, including their work capacity.

Other Job Seekers in receipt of the Disability Support Pension (DSP) without compulsory requirements are also considered to be Fully Eligible for JSA assistance and as such may choose to volunteer to participate in Work for the Dole.

**Will job seekers be excused from Work for Dole participation requirements on any given day where they may have other job seeker commitments such as interviews?**

Yes. Job interviews are a priority for all job seekers. If a job seeker is unable to attend a Work for the Dole activity because of a job interview, the job seeker will need to supply appropriate evidence that he or she was attending a job interview.

**What happens if a job seeker is unwell/otherwise prevented from completing the required hours per week? If a job seeker is sick or otherwise prevented from completing the required number hours per week, will they have to make up the missed hours? If so, how will the missed hours be made up, will job seekers have to do additional hours over the course of a number of weeks? If so, over how many weeks?**

Where a job seeker is unable to attend an appointment or activity, they must contact their provider beforehand to advise them of a valid reason for being unable to meet their requirement. If the job seeker does make contact prior to the absence, providers can be flexible and reschedule attendance so that job seekers still meet their mutual obligation requirements within the set time frame. Examples of a Reasonable Excuse include: being incapacitated due to illness, injury or disability; undertaking paid work; attending a job interview; or having unforeseeable and unavoidable caring responsibilities.

**Are there any exceptions to the plan to dock the fortnightly income support of Work for the Dole job seekers by 10% for every day they fail to show up for their Work for the Dole requirements?**

The only circumstances that jobseekers can have a financial penalty applied for not fulfilling their mutual obligation is when a jobseeker is activity tested and required to attend their Work for the Dole activity on a certain day and are not exempt from participation. Furthermore, if a job seeker does not attend their activity, the provider has discretion as to whether to apply a penalty. The provider will consider whether prior notice was given and whether there was a reasonable excuse.

As mentioned above, there are a range of exemptions from mutual obligation requirements that recognise the different family and personal situations that recipients may face which may prevent them from undertaking Work for the Dole.

The Department of Human Services will ultimately make the decision as to whether a financial penalty should be applied and they will not apply a financial penalty if they find that a Reasonable Excuse exists.