

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee
ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE
Additional Estimates 23-27 February 2015

Prime Minister and Cabinet Portfolio

Department/Agency: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
Outcome/Program: Outcome 2: Indigenous
Topic: Work for the Dole

Senator: Senator the Hon Jan McLucas

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Type of question: Written

Date set by the committee for the return of answer: 10 April 2015

Number of pages: 2

Question:

1. How much will host organisations be paid to supervise work for the dole activities, and how will this payment be determined?
2. How will the Minister ensure that jobseekers are not undertaking work that would otherwise be a paid position?
3. Will providers be contractually obligated to report non-compliance for all participants?
4. What is the effect of a non-compliance report? Punitive measures such as welfare payments being docked?
 - a. Is there any discretion to excuse non-compliance in limited circumstances (ie. illness, death in the family, other barriers) and who holds this discretion – providers or Centrelink?
5. What training activities are RJCP providers currently eligible to receive payments for? What training activities will no longer be supported under the Work for the Dole changes?
6. How will the Government determine what training will be supported?
7. Will existing payments to help job seekers buy clothing and equipment for training continue to be available?

Answer:

1. The Remote Jobs and Communities Program (RJCP) Guidelines, to take effect from 1 July 2015, will outline hosting and payment arrangements for work for the dole activities. The guidelines are being developed and will be tabled once available.
2. The RJCP Programme Guidelines will outline the process for ensuring job seekers in Work for the Dole projects are not undertaking work that would otherwise be a paid position.
3. Job-seeker compliance arrangements apply nationally, and are set out in the *Social Security Act 1991*. RJCP providers have a role in setting mutual obligation requirements

for job seekers and monitoring compliance with those requirements. Providers report instances of potential non-compliance to the Department of Human Services (DHS) but have the discretion not to do so if they believe an alternative approach may be more effective in re-engaging the job seeker.

4. The *Social Security Act 1991* allows for temporary withholding of payment (with back payment on compliance) or, for repeated non-compliance the imposition of penalties for non-compliance with activity test requirements. These requirements apply nationally, in both remote and non-remote areas.
 - a. Under the *Social Security Act 1991*, no penalty can be applied if a job seeker has a 'reasonable excuse' for their non-compliance. If the circumstances that resulted in the job seeker's failure to comply were either unforeseeable or outside the job seeker's control they will generally be taken to have a reasonable excuse. DHS is responsible for establishing whether or not the job seeker has a 'reasonable excuse'. Job seekers can also be exempt from meeting any mutual obligation requirements for a period if they advise DHS that they will not be able to meet their requirements (for example due to illness, the death of a close relative of unforeseen and unavoidable caring responsibilities).
5. RJCP providers are currently eligible to receive outcome payments for job-seekers who commence or complete Certificate I or higher. Funding will no longer be provided for 'training for trainings' sake that churns a job-seeker through courses that have no linkage to a real job or a job pathway.
6. Funding will be available to support training that is necessary for a job-seeker to obtain a job or to participate in a work-for-the dole activity. Funding will also be available for numeracy and literacy and for drivers licence training. Further guidance on the type of training that will be supported will be available in the RJCP Programme Guidelines.
7. Funding will be available for RJCP providers to ensure, where necessary, that job-seekers have the required clothing and equipment to undertake their participation requirements, including training and work-for-the dole activities.