

Productivity Commission

Job Network Review

(December 2001)

Submission from:

**Multicultural Development Association Inc
and the Multicultural Employment
Advocacy Network (QLD)**

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Please note: terms such as diverse culturally and linguistic backgrounds, migrant and refugee job-seekers and non-English speaking background people are used interchangeably throughout this submission

Introduction

This submission by Multicultural Development Association and the Multicultural Employment Advocacy Network has been written in response to the Public Inquiry of the Job Network and the Issues Paper. It highlights a number of issues for job-seekers in Queensland who are from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds.

The Multicultural Development Association (MDA) is a community-based organisation in Brisbane, Queensland that provides a number of services to migrants and refugees. Some of these services include; client and family focused settlement support, community development and education, research, advocacy, community development and grants access assistance.

It is through these services that we are kept informed of the many issues which affect both migrant and refugee communities throughout Queensland. Under the advocacy program there is a Multicultural Employment Advocacy Network in which both state and commonwealth government and community workers participate and advocate on employment related issues.

There are a number of issues, which affect many job seekers from migrant and refugee communities, in particular those from non-English speaking background. In summary, they are:

- Difficulties with English language skills.
- Lack of Recognition of Existing Qualifications/skills
- Lack of opportunities provided to migrants/refugees to demonstrate their overseas qualifications, skills and expertise
- Lack of local work experience
- Lack of references
- Lack of understanding of the Recruitment Process
- Lack of culturally appropriate employment and training services

In addition it is also important to note that this client group is diverse and complex in its construction. Employment and training issues also need to be viewed in the context of their migration and settlement experiences (including torture and trauma), prior education and employment in their homelands and the constraints experienced in participating within the labour market.

While this submission does not provide a comprehensive account of this context and associated employment and training issues, it is important to recognise that this target group in Queensland experience significant barriers in their quest to seek employment.

(It is recommended that readers may want to access the report “Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background, March 2001” available from Multicultural Affairs Qld for additional information.)

Since the Commonwealth Government’s introduction of the Job Network system in May 1998, a number of concerns have been identified in Queensland re: the effectiveness and response of this system for job-seekers of particularly disadvantaged groups within our community. One such group is people from culturally and linguistic diverse backgrounds, especially refugees. Current literature and documentation highlights that these job-seekers face additional barriers in seeking employment and this is reflected in higher than average state unemployment rates for some particular communities.

Job-seekers from cultural and linguistically diverse backgrounds and Job Network Providers.

Limited research has been undertaken in Queensland, which formally documents the usage and concerns of these job-seekers in accessing this current employment system. It is also necessary to note that Queensland does **NOT** have a migrant specific Job Network provider like other states such as New South Wales and Victoria. Therefore migrant and refugee job-seekers are totally dependant on existing Job Network providers for information, support and direct assistance towards obtaining employment.

While it is recognised that there are staff members at some Job Network agencies who are willing to assist and have a genuine desire to do so, it also appears that many agencies either become frustrated in working with this group or are unable to effectively support them. Anecdotal evidence from both community and government workers in Queensland cite the following issues:

1. Entry point and necessary information about Centreline and the Job Network system.

Currently there are no funded programs or resources which provide job-seekers from culturally and linguistic diverse background with the basic and necessary information of obtaining employment or training opportunities in Queensland. This function is performed on an ad hoc basis by some community services or through English classes, but there is no holistic approach or program provided by any government department. Therefore these customers have received minimal or no information about the Job Network system, its employment and training services and the rights and responsibilities of a client. It is this lack of basic knowledge that causes misunderstandings and frustrations for the jobseeker.

This is exacerbated by current processes and structures, which link Centerline offices with Job Network providers. Some examples include:

- Perceived roles and links between Centrelink and Job Network Providers. It is often not clear who is responsible for what and whether there is communication between the two services specially with regards to sharing of information. Many clients find they not only give relevant information to Centrelink but often to a number of Job Network Providers. Often different information is collected by both services.
- Confusion for clients with the initial assessment process at Centrelink i.e. the Job Seeker Classification Instrument. Many Centrelink officers at the front counter are either not trained in working with this target group or have insufficient resources to properly collect and ascertain accurate information. Often the client is so desperate for employment (and unaware of the employment processes) that they will provide information they think will increase their chances of getting a job. This is especially evident in terms of language proficiency. The rating from this instrument can therefore be misleading for both the client and the Job Network Providers and often results in frustration on both sides.
- The lack of appropriate mechanisms or sufficient communication between Centrelink staff and Job Network providers, which is often to the detriment of the client, including re-referring of clients, information about working between breaks of English classes and general support for the job-seeker.

In addition the following questions need to be raised at this initial stage:

- Are interpreters accessed where necessary to provide information and assist the jobseeker in understanding the job network system, including their rights and responsibilities?
- Are customers fully informed of the different types/level of assistance they can access from providers?
- Are customers made aware of the how the JSCI tool is used to determine their level of assistance from network providers?
- Are customers informed of the services available through the different providers?
- Are customers given information and assistance towards making a choice for a provider?
- Do customers understand the agreements contents they are signing?
- Are the customers informed of the complaint procedure through the Customer Service Line and the Code of Conduct, which defines the responsibilities of the provider?
- Is multilingual information available at this point for the customer?

In the Survey Report “NESB Access Issues in Logan and Beenleigh”, 91.66% of respondents did not have information about the job network service in another language. (Poole-Branchu.M, June 1999). This is of particular concern given that people from 161 countries reside in Logan, and nearly 29% were not born in Australia.

2. Limited awareness and understanding of the employment issues experienced by this target group.

It seems there is a demonstrated lack of understanding and awareness by many Job Network providers of the complexity of employment issues, which are experienced by this target group. This is exacerbated when staff will not access interpreters to understand their clients and issues and individual circumstances. While some migrant job seekers have found friendly and helpful staff, they were still unable to secure employment through the Provider.

Many of the providers have had limited or no training or knowledge about the settlement process and the effects this has on jobseekers, especially some practical difficulties such as lack of local work experience, current references and the lack of recognition of overseas qualifications and skills.

There is also ample evidence to demonstrate that some staff will not provide accurate and necessary information about what service and assistance customers can expect, including any training that is available.

“We have asked them about job training – nothing happened” (Somali client – Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background Report).

3. Communication

A common concern is the lack of communication between staff and the job-seeker, especially after the initial visit, throughout the job search process, and including the follow up with clients.

“My client has been with the same Provider for 6 months and has not received any correspondence or phone calls from them” (Ethnic community worker) and;

“They seldom communicate with the applicant. “Job Network Providers” receive documents but no contact is done with the applicant. You have to remind them now and then that you’re looking for work and need help”. (Eritrean client – Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background Report).

Communication seems to be limited in passing on general information about job vacancies, training programs, other support services and relevant resources available to assist in the process of securing employment or training.

In addition to this lack of communication there is minimal (if any) staff employed which can speak a second language or staff employed which have some understanding of cross-cultural practices/knowledge, including the access of interpreters. Most importantly, very

few staff members understand the settlement-integration processes of newly arrived refugees and migrants to be able to make a holistic assessment of their employment needs.

4. Discrimination

Discrimination (both direct and indirect), is cited consistently. Discrimination, mainly towards religion and/or race is the most prominent. *“Some of them are based on charity organisations such as Salvation Army and their philosophy is based on religion – if you don’t fill their moral values you will not get help”*. (Somali client – Employment Issues Facing People of Non-English Speaking Background Report).

“ I was told I would get a job more easily if I didn’t wear the headdress” (Said to a Muslim woman from a Job Network provider).

5. Interpreters

The use of interpreters by Job Network staff to assist with communication with clients does not occur frequently. In the Logan and Beenleigh Survey, 83.33% of respondents did not use interpreters, 40% of which stated there was no need, and the 16.66% that did use an interpreter service did so at the client’s request. (Poole-Branchu.M, June 1999). This is a crucial issue as misunderstandings often occur leading to more frustration for this particular target group.

It is important to bear in mind that it is difficult enough for people who have fluent English ability to understand the Job Network system and process, but more so for those with limited or no English who come from diverse cultures and who do not have the same job seeking system in their home country.

6. Other issues:

- client may be registered at more than one service, therefore increase in costs for membership fees;
- in some situations, migrants or refugees with limited English are being asked to participate in English classes, although they are more motivated in looking for work. They have been here for a few years and were able to find unskilled employment with their limited English. After working for many years, certain providers request they undertake more English classes, even though the clients will never be fluent in English.

Policy Framework

For the purpose of this submission, we would also like to mention some broader concerns in regards to the overall Job Network system and its effectiveness with our client group.

- The current tendering process and documentation is lengthy, cumbersome and not conducive to smaller non-government organisations, which prevents competing to become a provider. Smaller community based organisations often don't have the necessary infrastructure and resources as existing providers e.g. Mission Australia, Employment Plus. However, they usually have the expertise, knowledge and necessary assistance to help their clients in the job-seeking process as well as post employment support.
- The assessment criteria for potential service providers need to be reviewed. Given that there are long-standing issues with job-seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, there needs to be an overview of current practices, as well as extensive consultations with migrant and refugee communities in Queensland.
- The functioning and accountability of Job Network agencies/providers would be increased if a central co-ordinating mechanism were implemented. Such a mechanism could monitor the providers, assist with information and possibly provide/organise relevant training. Some practical examples of this would be; 'How to access Interpreters', Settlement Experiences of Refugees' etc.
- That Job Network providers demonstrate the percentage of their budget, which is used for accessing of interpreters for clients with English language difficulties.
- It would be advantageous for more effective communication between Job Network agencies and Centrelink and other government and community stakeholders. This is crucial to avoid sending clients from one organisation to another.
- Job-seekers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are often more isolated in regional and rural areas. Mechanisms need to be implemented which monitors the agencies in such areas.

Conclusion

We thank you for the opportunity to lodge this submission. Both MDA and the network are pleased to see the Commonwealth Government undertaking this initiative, and await

to read the pending report. The Job Network system has attracted positive responses both on a national and international level for its innovative approaches, but more work is needed to ensure that all job-seekers reap the rewards. Our client group in Queensland is in need of additional services, resources and commitment from the current Job Network agencies.