

Dear Commissioners

After becoming unemployed in January 2002, I have finally secured full time employment and wish to make some comments on the draft report on the Job Network:

Job Search Training

The report seems to take no account of private providers of career transition management or outplacement services. I was enrolled in a program at tmp worldwide from June 2001 until I found full time employment. This covered all aspects of job searching from use of the internet, resume preparation, applying for jobs, networking and interview practice. I also had one-to-one counselling and preparation for interviews, as well as advice on individual job applications.

The fact that I was enrolled in this program did not exempt me from Job Search Training. Although the communication from Centrelink indicated I would be "assessed", the assessment consisted of one test only - working or studying a minimum of 15 hours per week. I was able to get an exemption as I then secured some full-time casual work, but it seems to me a monumental waste of government funds to require individuals actively enrolled in an equivalent program to undergo the same course (in my case, quite probably of a lower quality) with a Job Network provider.

Although I can envisage a number of problems with monitoring private providers, I believe consideration should be given to an accreditation process which enables people actively enrolled in private programs to obtain an exemption. Bearing in mind that the report recommends Intensive Assistance be voluntary, this should apply to IA too.

Intensive Assistance

I was also picked up for Intensive Assistance. Although I was able to report a high level of job search activity, the only thing the IA staff member did was to require me to write a larger number of speculative applications than I was already writing, and set me an unreasonable benchmark of job ads to be responded to each week. As far as I was concerned this was pointless busy work - I had no desire to remain unemployed and felt this was clearly demonstrated by casual roles I took through my period of unemployment which were well below my level of skills and experience.

I found the experience utterly soul destroying - the staff member did not appear to have any counselling or support skills, and in fact his first remark was "this is a very senior resume". Well, I had been a senior manager. It was acknowledged that the kinds of jobs I was qualified to do never came up through the Job Network.

JCSI

I could be wrong, but the JCSI does not seem to take any account of work done by New Start recipients over the period they are receiving benefits. I qualified for benefits in April 2001 - between April 2001 and January 2002 I had 13 weeks in total off benefits as I was doing casual work.

I was informed at IA that the reason I had been selected was my age (42), the length of time I'd been unemployed, and my gender (female). On questioning why my gender was taken into account I was informed there were many women returning to the work force after having children - this is not my situation: I am single, childless, and until last year, had been in continuous full time employment since 1979.

Although it would appear to me that the JCSI counts unemployment from date of termination, Centrelink DOES take into account casual work in payment of the returning to work benefit. So I got all the hassles of being long term unemployed and none of the financial benefits.

I believe there is certainly a case for qualitative assessment of candidates for Job Network services. I have no doubt that Job Search Training helps a lot of people - I could see how badly it was needed from the "assessment" interview I attended. Given, however, that I was well resourced, it seems a drain on the system to compel me or people like me to participate in these activities.

Yours sincerely

Merryn Shaw

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