Response to consultation to inform the new employment services

December 2020

Overview

➢ Volunteering Support Services currently play a vital role in assisting many people (often with significant barriers to both employment and volunteering) to satisfy their mutual obligation requirements through helping them to find a volunteer role with approved Volunteer Involving Organisations. However, Volunteering Support Services receive no funding for performing this function.

➢ The Department of Education, Skills and Employment should review the extent and cost of the placement services currently provided by Volunteering Support Services but attributed to employment service providers. Volunteering is widely recognised and promoted as a pathway to employment; this is increasingly a driver of demand for volunteering.

➢ The New Employment Services Model, and specifically the Enhanced Services payment model, should delineate the responsibilities of Volunteering Support Services and employment service providers and ensure each is remunerated for the services provided.

Introduction

The Commonwealth Government has committed to reforming employment services to ensure they deliver better services to job seekers and employers and a better system for providers. The transition to the New Employment Services Model will take place from July 2022.

As part of the reforms, the most disadvantaged job seekers will receive 'Enhanced Services' delivered through employment service providers. The Department of Education, Skills and Employment is currently consulting[1] on the 'Enhanced Services payment model.'

This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies. We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the consultation process.

Issues

As part of mutual obligation requirements[2], job seekers may be required to undertake job search, attend employment services provider appointments, attend job interviews, and satisfy annual activity requirements. The annual activity requirement applies to job seekers in jobactive and refers to a requirement for them to undertake some additional activity, such as Work for the Dole, study or

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[1] https://www.employment.gov.au/consultation-inform-new-employment-services
[2] This is adapted from 'Volunteering and mutual obligation requirements for unemployment payment recipients' https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Revised-VA-factsheet-Mutual-Obligations-28-September-2020.pdf

training, paid work or voluntary work. Most job seekers have annual activity requirements which differ according to age and circumstance.

As highlighted by the Department[3], "*Volunteering can act as a valuable stepping stone into paid employment, where participants may gain important work-related skills and experience. For this reason, job seekers may count voluntary work towards their requirements if their provider considers the voluntary work to be beneficial in providing them with the necessary experience to help them into paid employment. Volunteer work is also an approved activity that may be counted towards job seekers' annual activity requirement.*" Further, those aged 55 and over can choose to fully meet their requirements through 30 hours of approved combinations of paid and volunteer work.

In order for volunteer work to count towards a job seeker's mutual obligation requirements, the organisation must be an approved voluntary work organisation. (This approval is done by Services Australia). A condition of approval for community-based organisations is that the organisation has appropriate public liability insurance and personal accident insurance. This covers volunteers for any accident or injury they have while working with the organisation. Organisations are also required to inform Services Australia if their circumstances (including insurance coverage) change.

Volunteering Support Services provide volunteering information and support to individuals, volunteers, managers of volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations. Volunteering can have an important role in supporting people who are long-term unemployed and/or experiencing poor mental health, as well as for people with disability and those new to Australia as part of their settlement experience.

Volunteering Support Services frequently use their local knowledge to assist jobseekers to find a volunteer role with pre-approved Volunteer Involving Organisations. This includes assisting jobseekers to ensure they meet their mutual obligation requirements, boosting the confidence of jobseekers, placing them in a volunteer role or providing them with training.

However, this interaction is done completely within the existing resources and funding of Volunteering Support Services.   In many instances, these potential volunteers are particularly resource intensive as they may require additional literacy and other support. The barriers to paid work that many individuals face are also barriers to volunteering and require adequate resources to be provided at the point of support (i.e. volunteer organisations not jobactive providers).

Jobactive providers sometimes refer those experiencing unemployment to Volunteering Support Services without consultation or acknowledgement.

Volunteering Support Services are not funded to carry out this function.

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[3] Ibid

In the current context, 'volunteer-to-job' cohorts place increasing demand on Volunteering Support Services with greater numbers of people being out of work and with volunteering being widely recognised as a pathway to paid employment.

Recommendations

We recommend that the Australian Government review the extent and cost of the placement services currently provided by Volunteering Support Services but attributed to jobactive providers. This should include an audit of the number of placements made by Volunteering Support Services and a valuation of the cost of providing placement services for mutual obligation participants.

Ultimately this should lead to service agreements which clearly delineate responsibilities of client placements between Volunteering Support Services and jobactive providers and which resources each sector accordingly.

We would very much welcome the opportunity to discuss the issues raised in this submission with the department.

Authorisation

This document has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.

Mr Mark Pearce
Chief Executive Officer

About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia's vision is strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

Endorsements

This position statement has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.

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