



Wednesday, 14 November 2018

Senate Education and Employment References Committee Inquiry into the appropriateness of jobactive Settlement Council of Australia – opening remarks (check against delivery)

The Settlement Council of Australia is grateful for the opportunity to provide input into today's hearing.

We represent over 100 agencies in the settlement sector across Australia, which comprise the vast majority of organisations providing settlement support to recently arrived migrants, including those from a refugee background.

Our members are actively engaged in their clients' journeys into employment and witness firsthand the challenges they have to overcome in this crucial element of the settlement process. Over the years, SCoA members have evolved their business practices to include a range of employment-related activities to supplement traditional mainstream employment services and indeed, a number of SCoA members are jobactive providers.

New Australians from a migrant and/or refugee background represent some (though clearly not all) of the most vulnerable job seekers and as a result encounter significant difficulty in entering the Australian labour market.

Engaging with the labour market is pivotal to successful settlement and is one of the most visible and important contributions that migrants make to Australia. Migrants pursue employment as a means of acquiring economic security for their families and welcome the opportunity to contribute to their new home.

That said, the settlement process for new Australians is complex and highly variable, meaning that not everyone is ready to start job-hunting immediately upon their arrival in Australia. For employment outcomes to be truly sustainable, migrants must first be supported through a number of complex and individual settlement foundations and policy must reflect that this will take different lengths of time depending on the personal circumstances of each individual and their families.

On that note, I should point out that for some, it is equally damaging to delay the commencement of employment services, as much as it is problematic for others to be forced to

commence job hunting too early in their settlement journey. That is to say, it is impossible to settle on an arbitrary time limit for when employment services should commence.

In our submission, SCoA has made a number of recommendations that would improve the ability of employment services to meet the needs of new Australians in a flexible and responsive manner.

I will briefly touch on just a couple and welcome comments or questions on any of the other matters raised in our submission.

First, the **overarching goal of future employment services should be to support long-term sustainable employment by ensuring job readiness among all job seekers, and not just focussing on employment outcomes for the sake of employment outcomes.**

What exactly constitutes “job readiness” will vary from job seeker to job seeker and so a client-centered model which assesses the strengths and needs of each job seeker and develops appropriate individualised pathways is essential.

In order to properly support this recommendation, **Employment Services should be restructured into separate functions to ensure a supportive and responsive system that acts in the best interests of the job seeker and maximises informed user choice in a culturally competent way.**

We suggest this is essential in order to improve the quality of the relationship between the job seeker and their consultant and as such the compliance role should be separated from the consultant’s. Too often we hear that the heavy focus on compliance detracts from the proper support many job seekers need.

Briefly, a telling example of this is the often-cited conflict between a job seeker’s mutual obligation requirements and their pursuit of support across the key foundations of settlement. For example, a job seeker who is actively engaging with their English language education should not, in our opinion, be required to choose between English classes and jobactive compliance. It is our submission that the settlement foundations must take priority.

As such, **any arbitrary time limit to commence mutual obligation requirements for newly arrived Australians should be abolished. Instead, early in their settlement journey, each job seeker from a migrant or refugee background should be provided with an individually tailored plan for entry into employment services which is informed by the their settlement service provider and which takes into account the specific assistance they need to achieve settlement foundations and job readiness, prior to commencing more general mutual obligations.**

It is this, we suggest, that will ensure the best possible employment outcomes for this vulnerable cohort of job seekers – thereby ensuring great outcomes for both the job seekers and the broader Australian economy.