

Senate Standing Committee on Education and Employment

QUESTIONS ON NOTICE Budget Estimates 2014-2015

Outcome 1 - Employment

Department of Employment Question No. EM0765_15

Senator Collins provided in writing.

Question

Work for the Dole requirements

The 2014-15 Budget provides that job seekers will have to do 25 hours of Work for the Dole activities per week in order to receive Newstart payments (15 hours per week in the trial sites). - Are there any exceptions to this requirement? - Will job seekers who can show that they are actively seeking work be excluded? - Will job seekers with disability be excluded? o If not, If so what arrangements will be made for the inherent restrictions on work that a person in receipt of a Disability Support Pension has? - Will job seekers be excused from WfD participation requirements on any given day where they may have other job seeker commitments such as interviews? - What happens if a job seeker is unwell/otherwise prevented from completing the required hours per week? - If a job seeker is sick or otherwise prevented from completing the required number hours per week, will they have to make up the missed hours? o If so, how will the missed hours be made up, will job seekers have to do additional hours over the course of a number of weeks? If so, over how many weeks? - Are there any exceptions to the Government's plan to dock the fortnightly income support of Work for the Dole job seekers by 10% for every day they fail to show up for their Work for the Dole requirements?

Answer

Subject to the passage of legislation, from 1 January 2015 all new job seekers under 30 years of age claiming Newstart Allowance, Youth Allowance and Special Benefit would be subject to a 26 week initial waiting period. Job seekers would then be eligible to receive income support for 26 weeks subject to participation Work for the Dole for 25 hours per week.

The following categories of income support recipients aged under 30 are exempt from this measure:

- those in full-time education;
- those assessed with a partial work capacity (<30 hours per week);
- parents receiving Family Tax Benefit for a FTB child;
- part-time apprentices;
- principal carer parents;
- Stream 3 or Stream 4 job seeker under the current employment services arrangements;
- those in Disability Employment Services.

Job seekers will be required to actively seek work in addition to participating in Work for the Dole.

This measure does not apply to people on the Disability Support Pension, job seekers who are participating in Disability Employment Services or assessed as having a partial work capacity of less than 30 hours per week.

Under the first phase of the Government's Work for the Dole programme, for the period 1 July 2014 to 30 June 2015, any exemptions, exclusions and compliance arrangements that currently apply will continue to apply. Job seekers who are temporarily unable to participate may be granted an exemption from Work for the Dole. There is a range of exemptions that recognise the different family and personal situations that recipients may face which prevent them from participating in activities, including temporary illness or incapacity (as evidenced by a doctor's medical certificate), family and caring obligations, and major personal crises such as homelessness.

Under current arrangements as long as the job seeker gives prior notice to their provider, they will be able to attend job interviews whilst participating in Work for the Dole without penalty.

If a job seeker contacts their provider and produces a valid medical certificate for a short-term absence, they would normally need to make up the hours. However the employment service provider will have discretion considering the length of absence and flexibility in the Work for the Dole activity to make up hours.

As is currently the case, job seekers who fail to participate in Work for the Dole can be subject to No Show No Pay penalties of ten per cent of their fortnightly payment for each failure. Job seekers who have a reasonable excuse for their failure or who have an exemption are not subject to penalties for failing to meet their requirements, and are not required to make up the hours they have missed.