

Senate Finance and Public Administration Legislation Committee

ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

Finance and Administration Portfolio

Department of Human Services and agencies

Supplementary Budget Estimates 2005-2006, 1 November 2005

Question: HS7

Outcome 1, Output 1.1

Topic: Centrelink - Letters to Parenting Payment customers about compulsory participation interviews and the telephone contacts for voluntary referral to Job Network

Hansard Page/Written Question on Notice: F&PA 97 1/11/05

SENATOR WONG asked on 1/11/2005:

Senator WONG—Could you take the provision of those letters on notice, please?

Mr Whalan—I can.

Senator WONG—I am particularly interested in the ones sent to parenting payment recipients, but if there are letters for people who are on DSP then obviously I would like to see those as well. Is there more than one version or is there a standardised version across Centrelink?

Answer:

There are a number of separate processes being discussed during this exchange:

1. Annual compulsory interview requirements for Parenting Payment recipients, introduced under the Australians Working Together Budget initiative.
2. 'Rapid Connection' contacts with Parenting Payment recipients to offer a voluntary referral to Job Network and requires no compulsory action from the customer.

These processes are explained below, including booking of compulsory interviews and any relevant letters.

Information about a letter sent to Disability Support Pension customers is also provided below.

1 – Annual interview contacts with Parenting Payment recipients

The requirement to attend an annual participation interview applies to all customers who have been receiving Parenting Payment for a continuous period of at least 6 months, whose youngest child is aged 6 years or older. Until their youngest child turns 13, these customers have voluntary participation requirements – this means that there is no requirement apart from attending the annual interview with Centrelink. This requirement was implemented in September 2002, as part of the Australians Working Together initiative. These customers are generally assisted by Centrelink's Personal Advisers.

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Where a compulsory participation interview with a Personal Adviser or JET Adviser is arranged for a Parenting Payment customer, a letter must be sent to that customer to advise them about the interview.

This is an example of the compulsory annual interview notification letter sent to Parenting Payment customers whose youngest child has not yet turned 13.

Front of letter:

“We have made an appointment for you with a Centrelink Personal Adviser, to discuss how we may be able to help you. We would like to talk to you, even if you are already doing some paid work or other activities such as study or voluntary work.

You can talk to your Personal Adviser about your current situation, and what you want for yourself and your family. We can discuss balancing your family responsibilities with other commitments, and help with child care issues. We may be able to advise you about useful resources and assistance programs, and fresh options for jobs, careers and acquiring new skills. We can also help you to develop a practical plan of action to help you achieve your goals.

Please come to:

(Appointment details, including Address, date and time of interview – includes phone contact where applicable)

It is very important that you attend this interview. Please call us on {phone number} if you can not attend. If this time does not suit you, we may be able to arrange a different time. Your Parenting Payment may be affected if you do not attend, or if we do not hear from you. The back of this letter has more information.

If you will need an interpreter, please let us know so we can arrange one. You can also have another person with you when you talk to us, such as a friend, family member or someone else who might assist you.

There is other important information about this interview below. Please take some time to read it, and feel free to contact us if you have any questions.”

Back of letter:

“Do I have to attend this interview?”

Under the terms of the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999, you must attend this interview to talk about options for further assistance. If there are circumstances which make it hard or unreasonable for you attend, you will need to talk to us about this. Or, if you think that you may not be able to attend an interview for any reason, please let us know.

We will take your individual circumstances into account, but if you do not come to this interview without a good reason, or if we do not hear from you, your Parenting Payment may be stopped. Note that we will always try to contact you first before taking any action. Please feel free to talk to us if you have any questions or concerns.

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What is a Centrelink Personal Adviser?

Personal Advisers are there to help people to reach their goals - such as returning to work or study, changing careers or acquiring new skills. They are there to listen, and to help people find positive solutions for everyday issues. And they can provide individual, ongoing support, tailored for each person's different needs.

How can my Personal Adviser help me?

You may already be doing some paid work, or undertaking study, training or other activities. You may be quite happy with your current circumstances, and your plans for the future. But you can still talk to us about other opportunities which may be available, or how we can help you to achieve your aims sooner. For example, you could be interested in looking at your choices for assistance with child care. Many people are surprised to find how much useful information and resources we can offer, to help make things easier for you.

If you are not doing any paid work or similar activity, your Personal Adviser can help you to look at your options. It is not always easy to get back in to work, training or study straight away, especially if you have been busy looking after your family for some time. You could have decided that you want to try something else - a new job, a new career, or a different lifestyle. We can offer you advice on these things and how it could affect your payment. We can also help you to develop a personalised action plan for yourself, to get you started in the right direction.

We understand that working towards your goals usually takes time. That is why your Personal Adviser can help you to check how you are going with your plans, and offer continuing assistance.

What will happen at my interview?

Your Personal Adviser will talk to you about your situation, and look at what type of assistance will best suit your needs. If you have some ideas about things you would like to do, think about writing them down before your interview.

We will invite you to develop a Participation Plan. Your Plan will set out the things you want to achieve. It will be a handy reference for you, setting out the contacts, referrals and resources you may use, and the activities and steps which you propose to take. We may also give you a Participation Record, to help you keep track of your progress.

Your Personal Adviser may refer you to another service provider, such as a Job Network member, or to one of Centrelink's specialist or professional officers for further assistance. We may also check that the information we already have about you is correct. This is to make sure that you are receiving your correct entitlement."

Other letters:

The equivalent interview notification letter for a person who has been receiving Parenting Payment for at least 6 months and whose youngest child is aged 13 or older, is the same as the one above, except for one section on the back of the letter ('What will happen at my interview?'):

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“Do I have to attend this interview?”

Under the terms of the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999, you must attend this interview to talk about options for further assistance. If there are circumstances which make it hard or unreasonable for you to attend, you will need to talk to us about this. Or, if you think that you may not be able to attend an interview for any reason, please let us know.

We will take your individual circumstances into account, but if you do not come to this interview without a good reason, or if we do not hear from you, your Parenting Payment may be stopped. Note that we will always try to contact you first before taking any action. Please feel free to talk to us if you have any questions or concerns.

What is a Jobs, Education and Training (JET) Adviser?

JET Advisers are there to help people to reach their goals - such as returning to work or study, changing careers or acquiring new skills. They are there to listen, and to help people find positive solutions for everyday issues, and they can provide individual, ongoing support, tailored for each person's different needs.

How can my JET Adviser help me?

You may already be doing some paid work, or undertaking study, training or other activities. You may be quite happy with your current circumstances, and your plans for the future. But you can still talk to us about other opportunities which may be available, or how we can help you to achieve your aims sooner. For example, you could be interested in looking at your choices for assistance with child care. Many people are surprised to find how much useful information and resources we can offer, to help make things easier for you.

If you are not doing any paid work or similar activity, your JET Adviser can help you to look at your options. It is not always easy to get back in to work, training or study straight away, especially if you have been busy looking after your family for some time. You could have decided that you want to try something else - a new job, a new career, or a different lifestyle. We can offer you advice on these things and how it could affect your payment. We can also help you to develop a personalised action plan for yourself, to get you started in the right direction.

We understand that working towards your goals often takes time. That is why your JET Adviser can help you to check how you are going with your plans, and offer continuing assistance.

What will happen at my interview?

Your JET Adviser will talk to you about your situation, and look at what type of assistance will best suit your needs. If you have some ideas about things you would like to do, think about writing them down before your interview.

At this interview, you will be required to negotiate and enter into a Participation Agreement, which will set out one or more activities which you have agreed to do. It will be a handy reference for you, setting out the contacts, referrals and resources you may use, and the activities and steps which you propose to take.

If you are receiving Parenting Payment and your youngest child has turned 13, you may need to do up to 150 hours of an approved activity over each 26 week period. If you are already taking part in a suitable activity (such as paid work, voluntary work or study) then you are welcome to keep going with it, and you can use it to meet your requirements. However if you are not already doing an

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activity, you will need to choose one, and start taking part in that activity in the near future. We may also give you a Participation Record, to help you keep track of your progress.

In some circumstances, your Parenting Payment may be stopped if you do not enter into a Participation Agreement. However please remember that you would NOT be expected to do an approved activity which is unreasonable or unsuitable for you. We will take into account your and your family's individual circumstances, as well as your own goals, preferences and suggestions. In some cases, you may not need to start an approved activity straight away, or you may not have to do an activity if you have a child with a severe disability or illness, or if your personal circumstances may make this difficult. Your JET Adviser would be happy to talk to you about this.

Your JET Adviser may refer you to another service provider, such as a Job Network member, or to another one of Centrelink's specialist or professional officers for further assistance. We may also check that the information we already have about you is correct. This is to make sure that you are receiving your correct entitlement.

Please talk to us if you have any questions. And remember that your JET Adviser is there to help you.

There are also Personal Adviser interviews for Parenting Payment customers with voluntary interview attendance requirements – this includes customers who have not yet been receiving Parenting Payment for at least 6 months, or whose youngest child has not yet turned 6. Voluntary participation interviews are arranged only at the customer's request, and there is no requirement for a letter to be sent in this case. If a letter is offered to assist the person, it is formatted as follows:

Example letter – voluntary participation interview with a Personal Adviser:

“You recently asked to talk to a Personal Adviser, so we have made an appointment for you.

Please come to (Appointment details, including Address, date and time of interview – includes phone contact where applicable)

Please call us on {phone number} if you will not be coming to this appointment, or you would like to make a new time.

If you will need an interpreter, please let us know so that we can arrange one. You can also have another person with you when you talk to us, such as a friend, family member or someone else who might assist you.”

2 – Rapid Connection contacts

The ‘Rapid Connection’ initiative is directed towards all Parenting Payment customers but is not part of the same process as the Australians Working Together annual interviews. The specific objective of the Rapid Connection initiative for Parenting Payment (single and partnered) customers is to offer them a voluntary referral to the Job Network. Disability Support Pension (DSP) customers may be offered a referral to Employment Assistance Providers as an alternative to Job Network members if they are assessed as suitable for a referral, through an inbound service offer by Customer Service Centres. As with Parenting Payment customers these referrals are voluntary.

The strategies involve two types of contacts made via Centrelink Offices and Call Centres:

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1. 'Outbound' contacts that are telephone calls made by Centrelink Call or Network staff to the customer to ask them if they are interested in connection to the Job Network.

- the Call Centre Outbound strategy has been targeted at Parenting Payment customers who have: a youngest child over the age of six; have provided their contact numbers; English is their preferred language; are not registered as a job seeker; are not working over 20 hours a week or earning over \$553.60 per fortnight; and have not had a recent bereavement or a child with a severe disability;
- the Network Outbound strategy has been targeting Parenting Payment (single) customers along similar criteria, in addition to being; in receipt of Pensioner Education Supplement; in receipt of Child Care Benefit; or having declared earnings over the last year but not recently. ; and

2. 'Inbound' service offer.

- Centrelink employees take the opportunity presented by Parenting Payment customers, who contact Centrelink, either by telephone or in person, to discuss with the customer the offer of a voluntary referral to a Job Network member. For the purpose of the Rapid Connection, no new interview invitation letters were created. Where appropriate existing letters, like the Personal Adviser and JET Adviser examples provided above, are used.
- In Centrelink Offices, during face-to-face contacts, DSP recipients are offered a referral to the Employment Assistance provider that is most appropriate for their needs. For these customers referral to any service is voluntary. Where appropriate staff use the following letter for DSP customers.

Example letter – invitation to talk to a Centrelink Disability Officer (front of letter only)

Thank you for contacting me about assistance that is available to help you prepare for and find suitable work.

I am a Disability Officer at Centrelink. My role is to help people who may need assistance with finding the right job or deciding what to do next, because of an illness, injury or disability. I work closely with other service providers who can offer employment assistance. There is more information on the back of this letter about what I do, and how I can help you.

I have arranged an appointment for us to meet and talk. Our talk will be informal and is entirely voluntary. You are welcome to have a friend or relative with you.

Your appointment details are:

Day and Date: {Tuesday} {1 December 2005}

Time: {2.00pm}

Where: {Yarra Customer Service Centre}

If this time or venue is unsuitable, please phone me on {number} to make other arrangements.

If you would like an interpreter present at our talk please phone me so that I can arrange one.

I look forward to meeting you or hearing from you soon.

Yours sincerely

{Name}

{Customer Service Officer}